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HUMAN NATURE : THE MARXIAN VIEW

HUMAN NATURE: THE MARXIAN VIEW

BY

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V.V.

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To R. D. V.

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Preface

THE SCIENCES, on the whole, have learned how to deal rather more intelligently and effectively with the non-human side of nature than with the human side. Although medicine is rapidly becoming a very solid comfort to us in its field, the conscious, organized, systematic sciences viewed all together, do still seem somewhat surer of their expertness in ways of destroying life than in those of promoting and maintaining it. And while biology can now boast of approximately a full century of adulthood — if the mark of maturity is the amount of control a scientific discipline affords — the sciences of the strictly *human* branch of living things, psychology, sociology, history, anthropology, economics, politics, still show unmistakably the actual tenderness of their years.

In short, we have relatively little operative knowledge about man, for all the *information* we have managed to collect about him. A lot of “facts” are known, much comparative, classifying and organizing work has been accomplished, there are plenty of interesting theories, there are even “schools” of anthropological thought, but there is not yet any universally accepted and soundly established body of workable intelligence about man that could be called a science in the sense in which chemistry, for example, can be called a science. Whole segments of non-human nature have been brought under our governance by the disciplines proper to them. But we cannot yet stop men from fighting, from suffering poverty, from going mad, and we cannot even plan our private lives with any degree of confidence; whether our collective efforts can be brought to bear successfully on even such a relatively simple matter as inflation, is still conjectural in a way that, say, photosynthesis is not conjectural. And as to the more radical manipulations of man’s character and lot that would be possible if we had for them such sciences as physics and chemistry, our backwardness has been so patent and so deplorable that the melancholy adage “You can’t change human nature,” has

become, in the popular mind at least, though not amongst most psychologists and anthropologists, almost an article of faith.

That there is need for a science of man and of things human — not just a contemplative, interpretive science, not a mere statistical and classificatory one, but an operative science, a science that gives leverage for manipulation in accordance with long term purposes — is obvious enough. And to many people of our time the possibility that such a science, or several such sciences, will eventually be established, has grown in the last half century to seem a real one. This is undoubtedly due in part at least to the influence of two quite different movements, one in the general field of psychology, one in the general field of sociology, that have not only been very much in the foreground of public attention, but have led serious and numerically considerable groups to believe, each in its way, that a science of man is actually already in existence. In psychology, most of the people who are active in the field of psychotherapeutics, the major impetus for which has come, directly and indirectly, from the discoveries and thoughts of Sigmund Freud, believe themselves already able to modify individual human personalities by techniques which are genuinely scientific. And ever since Karl Marx enunciated his “laws of history” and undertook to make a science of society, millions of earnest and public minded people, often of high intelligence, have come to see themselves as active participants in the most gigantic enterprise ever undertaken consciously by any group of men: the scientific transformation of “human nature” itself, on a world-historical scale — by techniques which precisely because they are collective rather than individual are held to be more sweeping, powerful, and effective than any the psychologist of the individual can devise.

Though both the “psychoanalytic” and the “scientific socialist” movements remain marginal to conventional academic psychology and sociology — and are sometimes at odds with each other — there can be no question, I think, that they have exerted a more profound and revolutionary influence on contemporary thought in general than any of their more orthodox competitors. They are “world views” as well as “sciences,” and their concepts

have in one form or another entered into and become constituent parts of what may be called the twentieth century world view in a way that few of the narrower or more rigorously positivistic concepts have done. Their interest therefore, to the student of man, extends beyond that merely of their inner content, or whatever original and valid discoveries they may have made. They reflect a cultural epoch, and, to the extent that ideas may be generative, even provide, perhaps, anticipatory glimpses of certain aspects of future man and society.

The intended function of this book is to make available to modern thought a comprehensive, detailed and systematic account of the Marxian theory of man — not in comparison or in contrast with the Freudian or with any other, or with such truths about human beings as the anthropological sciences may have more recently discovered or are today involved in verifying — but simply in and for itself. Why? Simply because no such account exists. Most other influential modern “anthropologies,” including Freud’s, have been exposed repeatedly to public view, in their full structure and most complete detail. There has even grown up in recent years a considerable comparative and critical literature around the subject of Freud *and* Marx. But the Marxian theory of man itself, partly no doubt because it represents only a single phase of Marxian thought in general, has hitherto had no comprehensive exposition and analysis to focus it, within that general outlook, for objective study as a systematic whole. Students of the history of anthropological theory have always been constrained to guess at it more or less haphazardly from the Marxian views on nature, history, economics, society and politics.

As a student, myself, of ethics, of the anthropological sciences, and of the history of ideas in general, I have long been aware of this gap and of the need for having it filled. And now the movement of historical events has lent a certain urgency to the need. It would seem that if anything at all is capable of affecting that traditionally unaffected “human nature,” the cataclysmic global transformations currently in process are apt, for better or worse, to do it. Should these events in any way be functioning as instruments in what Marx conceived to be the “science” of

human transformation, the general characteristics of that "science" should certainly be known. And if, as many people hope, fear, suspect, or merely believe, the Soviet Union considers itself as consciously committed, in whatever way twentieth-century actualities permit of a nineteenth-century theory, to the Marxian "science" of man, then the present powerful position for historical leverage of the "socialist sixth" of the world makes it all the more important that there be on record for general reference a precise statement of what, in its basic formulation, that "science" is.

I have tried therefore to put down here, in as complete detail and in as systematic form as possible, what the two founders of this science — for they were convinced that it was a science, not just a speculative theory — actually thought about man, what Karl Marx, and his intellectual intimate and co-worker, Frederick Engels, conceived, within the framework of their theories of nature and society as a whole, to be the nature of the human being, the determinants of man's development and transformation, the springs of human motivation, and the scientific methods to be followed both for understanding human nature and for changing it.

For the most part I found their actual tenets reasonably accessible to discovery; careful study of the texts made them sufficiently evident, and, even when they were relatively unsystematized, showed them as sufficiently congruous with one another, to assure both their accurate statement and their intelligible organization within the anthropological reference frame. In perhaps as many as two or three instances, systematic junctures seemed obscure and the surrounding ideas were not explicitly enough elaborated to provide objective certainty. Here, as will be seen, I tried to satisfy objective probabilities on the basis of whatever total evidence the texts provided. Throughout the book I have assumed in consonance not only with its systematizing objective but with common sense, that where two or more interpretations of the evidence are equally possible, the one that makes most sense, rather than the one that makes least, was probably Marx's and Engels' own. In the interests of accuracy in

general, I have used their language as frequently as was consistent with continuity of exposition.

Since my aim has not been to find new documents and special sources of information, or to strain for unique, oblique, or politically or philosophically tendentious reinterpretations of Marxian thought, whatever "novelty" may emerge from these pages should derive primarily from whatever novelty the enterprise itself possesses — namely, its anthropological focus, and the systematic co-ordination of the anthropological materials within the general Marxian philosophy. If the answers I have found to some of the more difficult problems which this enterprise occasioned, should, perchance, prove to be as original with knowledge in general as they were in fact with me, this should measurably increase the book's usefulness. But it does not add to its pretensions. I have hoped only to contribute to a full, accurate and systematic understanding of Marx's and Engels' thoughts on man, and to add whatever new perspective to the critical literature such a contribution may carry of itself.

My bibliographical obligations are chiefly to the letters, pamphlets, articles, books, notes, and speeches which constitute Marx's and Engels' own vast literary output. In accordance with my objective of doing an "inside job," I have largely avoided the use of "outside" commentaries — not only hostile or "neutral" ones, but even those of such sympathetic interpreters and competent practitioners as Lenin. The book may suffer in breadth of reference and perspective from this "lone wolf"—or, as Marx and Engels might themselves have labeled it—"bourgeois individualistic," treatment, but it seemed the only way even to hope to obviate the likelihood of merely confounding worse the controversial confusion which the subject matter itself has so generally inspired: perhaps on no other theory of modern times has such a wide variety of special axes been ground as on the Marxian.

My greatest personal obligation is probably to the late Alan Porter, who first showed me that the literature of Marx and Engels, from which I had theretofore maintained a decorous academic distance, was worthy of most serious philosophical and

scientific attention, and whose own understanding of that literature I now realize was sounder and more perspicacious than that of anyone I have known.

At least one representative each, and sometimes more, of philosophy, psychology, sociology, economics, and the laity, have read the manuscript, or parts of it, with varying degrees of protest, interest or approval, contributing in every case valuable suggestions which I have used and which I gratefully acknowledge. If I have not been able to profit by every suggestion made by each of those contributors, this is because the proposals advanced were occasionally in such basic disagreement with one another that satisfactory resolution seemed impossible.

Except perhaps for Ruth Venable, who had to bear most with me in the course of the writing, and who gave the manuscript its closest combing for accuracy of reference, understanding of the texts, clarity of language, consistency, and sense, Professor J. H. Randall, Jr., was certainly its most constant, longest, and most patient servitor and sponsor. He gave with utmost liberality of his time, his labour, his sense of language and of humour, his learning, insight, encouragement, and, by no means least, abuse — always in the most judiciously provocative manner, and my debt to him is greater, I am sorry to say, than the actual result will show. Professors Horace L. Friess and Herbert W. Schneider, always generous with interest and with help, aided me in ironing out a number of major wrinkles and innumerable kinks. Professor Otto Nathan's careful reading of the sections directly involving economics, in which I felt least at home perhaps, was a more important service to me than he knows. Professor Otto Klineberg, under heaviest pressures from his own work, took time to read the manuscript prior to its final preparation for the publisher, and made valuable criticisms. He is responsible for a rather basic change which has very much increased the intelligibility of the book's whole argument. My friends and colleagues at Vassar College have been solicitous of my interests, and often, by their co-operation, have made time available to me which I would not otherwise have had.

V. V.

Human Nature : the Marxian View

PART ONE

MAN IN GENERAL : CHANGE

Hitherto men have constantly made up for themselves false conceptions about themselves, about what they are and what they ought to be. They have arranged their relationships according to their ideas of God, or normal man, etc. The phantoms of their brains have gained the mastery over them. They, the creators, have bowed down before their creatures. Let us liberate them from the chimeras, the ideas, dogmas, imaginary beings under the yoke of which they are pining away.

The German Ideology

CHAPTER I

Fact and Theory

MARX AND ENGELS were reluctant, on the whole, to do much talking about "man." They were happier speaking of "men." Man, human nature in general, was too little of anything in particular to satisfy their predilection for the actual, the concrete, the living, the real. Men, they felt, can be seen and touched, observed in their habitats, studied in their habits, argued with, fought with, exhorted to revolution, treated meaningfully in scientific terms. Mankind as such can not be dealt with thus.

Hence it is no genuine paradox that there were, after all, two broad assertions, two fundamental and covering statements that they felt not only willing to make, but eager to reiterate about "man" at large. "Human nature," they claimed, is essentially subject to change. "Human nature," they maintained in as many ways as they could think of, is constituted by, and entirely constituted by, the behaviour and powers of concrete individuals or groups of individuals within their several physical and historical environments, changing these environments and themselves changing with those changes.

In avowing these convictions, Marx and Engels were not expecting to make themselves popular. They were, as usual, doing battle, and they had no illusions about the formidable nature of the opposition. All of what they conceived to be typically "bourgeois" ideology was arrayed against them, as well as some of the most powerfully entrenched popular sloganry in the history of the *cliché* (e.g., "You can't change human nature."). Against them, too, in almost solid front, stood the great tradition of classical speculative anthropology, the widely influential "metaphysical" human nature theories of their own century and the previous one, and the anthropologies of almost every ecclesiastical denomination that theology had had the subtlety to differentiate. Even "science," the ally Marx and Engels chose against metaphysics and dogma, was far from being committed

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equally heartily to them: much of psychology, often the most scientifically pretentious of it, was, and some still is, essentially hostile to their way of thought.¹

Here, then, was a large order of battle, but Marx and Engels felt that they had heavy batteries to undertake it with and a proper reward attending their ultimate triumph. Supporting the ideological offensive were: *dialectical materialism*, their naturalistic philosophy of change and interaction; *historical materialism*, their theory of social and cultural transformation and of the interactive, emergent, and progressive character of history's movement; *economic materialism*, an elaborate subdivision of, or rather basis for, their social theory, essentially more potent, they believed, than any comparable bourgeois economic ordinance for this was purely analytical, while theirs encompassed sociological and historical dimensions too. For ultimate victory, on this and other fronts, they had no less than a world to win, the "socialist stage" of history.

Now what, precisely, did Marx and Engels conceive to be the relation between this socialist objective with its copious theoretical accoutrements, and the convictions they held about the nature of human nature? That "human nature" changes was their general contention. That "human nature" is to be understood neither idealistically nor mechanistically, but dialectically, was their specific procedural credo. This means that "human nature," on the one hand, was for them no single universal form or general essence which individual human beings share; nor was it, on the other, the mere sum total, the mere numerical assemblage of those separate individuals, themselves to be conceived — like the "ultimate particles" of metaphysics or the

¹ Today psychology for the most part stresses the variability and malleability of "human nature." During Marx's time, this was not so. The powerful "instinct" schools, for example, tended to reduce man's behaviour to certain ultimate and immutable instincts, attitudes, or "traits of human nature." These schools are by no means, of course, without important contemporary representatives. One thinks, in comparatively recent times, of McDougall, James, Warren, Thorndike, *et al.* In a somewhat different field, Sigmund Freud is a notable instance of an "eternal trait" psychologist (see especially *Totem and Tabu*), though in many respects the Freudian findings are by no means incompatible with Marxism. Marx, incidentally, had an interesting "ideological" explanation for the resistance which "bourgeois" scientists exhibit toward dialectical concepts. See below, p. 44.

"simple identities" of logic — as atomic isolates, irreducible, self-sufficient, divorced or analytically divorcible from each other or from any common matrix. Neither "universal form" nor "particular thing" properly describes the man of Marxist thought. "Function in a field," "variable in an interactive context," perhaps more nearly fits.² What actual scientific status, then, did these two central concepts have for Marx and Engels, what roots in concrete fact? Were they, as contingencies of the socialist ideal, more than mere wishful celebrations? As necessary implications of the Marxian theories, were they more than mere logical adjuncts to, or a priori deductions from, those theories? And what of the theories themselves — were they "scientific," generalized from any actual fact? Or were they merely speculative? Were they "new," "original," or were they mere inheritances from the past, mere borrowings from others? Does historical materialism, to be specific, accomplish anything but a forced marriage between the St. Simonean concept of class struggle and the Smith-Ricardo labour theory of value, and is dialectical materialism anything more than a celebratory synthesis of all this and Hegel too? The critical literature is full of outside opinions on these subjects. It will be interesting to try, ourselves, to get an inside one. What were Marx's and Engels' own considered estimates of the general situation?

Let us consider the second set of questions first. Unlike Descartes, their revolutionary predecessor who helped inaugurate the "bourgeois stage" of history and who would not confess to having learned from anyone, Marx and Engels were, on the whole, ready recognizers of their founts and sources. Their major obligation they saw as threefold — to the French utopian socialists St. Simon and Fourier and to the English Owen, to the British economists, particularly Ricardo and Adam Smith, and to the German philosophers, especially Hegel and Feuerbach. And they are usually fairly modest in their own claims to origi-

² A brief but suggestive methodological comparison between dialectical materialism and contemporary "field theory" is to be found in *Psychology and the Social Order*, by J. F. Brown, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1936, p. 484 f. For a detailed elaboration, in modern terminology, of a Marxian methodological viewpoint, see *A Philosophy for a Modern Man*, by Hyman Levy, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1938.

nalinity. "As to myself," writes Marx, for example,³ "no credit is due me for discovering the existence of classes in society nor yet the struggle between them. Long before me bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this class struggle and bourgeois economists the economic anatomy of the classes." So too respecting Hegel: "At the very time when I was working at the first volume of *Das Kapital*," he recounts, "the peevish and arrogant mediocrities who nowadays have the ear of the cultured people in Germany, were pleased to treat Hegel . . . as a 'dead dog.' I therefore openly avowed myself a disciple of that great thinker, and occasionally, in the chapter on the theory of value, even toyed with the modes of expression peculiar to him . . . he was the first to present the general forms of [dialectical] movement in a comprehensive and conscious manner."⁴

But if they did not hide their debt to others, neither did they consider it as coextensive with their own productions. Some things, they believed, were original with themselves. And so, perhaps as often as they exhibited their relationship to the past as one of clear dependence, they showed it too as one of definite advance, as reaction against, addition to, or scientific correction of others' thoughts. In such claims as these they were usually quite specific. "What I did that was new," says Marx for example, in the same letter in which he places credit elsewhere for class struggle, "was to prove: (1) that the existence of classes is only bound up with *particular, historic phases in the development of production*; (2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the *dictatorship of the proletariat*; (3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the *abolition of all classes and to a classless society*."⁵ So too with Hegel. If Hegel was the dialectical

³ Letter to Georg Weydemeyer, *Marx Engels Selected Correspondence*, International Publishers, New York, 1936, p. 57.

⁴ *Capital*, Preface to Second Edition, Charles H. Kerr & Co., Chicago, 1906, Vol. I, p. 25. All reference will be to this text, but I shall not always restrict myself to its particular renderings.

⁵ The emphases are Marx's. For a detailed picture of the relation to the French socialists, see Frederick Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, Chapter I, in *Karl Marx Selected Works*, International Publishers, N. Y. (no date), Vol. I, pp. 140-55; Engels, *Prefatory Note to the Peasant War in Germany*, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, p. 548; *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*, Abt. I, Bd. 6, p. 533 ff, this being *The Communist Manifesto*, *English Op. Cit.*, Vol. I, p. 237 ff.

For the relation to the classical economists, especially Ricardo, see *Capital*, Vol. I,

Allah and Marx and Engels in a sense his prophets, they do not hesitate to scold him for omission and even serious misconstruction of the truth. Some of their best polemics, and they were talented polemicists, are aimed at his idealism, at what they deemed his anti-scientific perversion of the order of reality. "My own dialectical method," Marx feels therefore justified in claiming, "is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. For Hegel . . . the thinking process is the demiurge (creator) of the real world, and the real world is only the outward manifestation of 'the Idea.' With me, on the other hand, the ideal is nothing other than the material world reflected by the human mind."⁶ Keen, in short, as Hegel was in dialectical analysis, sound as was his insight into change, he was plunged into all manner of mystifying fantasies and errors, they believed, by his failure to recognize the actual, empirical source of that insight itself. This source as Marx and Engels saw it, was in truth and fact, the objective, material world in which on the one hand Hegel lived, worked, and drew the nourishment and means of livelihood that permitted him to exist as a body with a brain capable of philosophizing, and, on the other, from which he drew the actual content of his thought and generalized the laws governing it. It was this real world, as Marx and Engels understood the causal order, which "caused" Hegel's philosophy in any ultimate sense in which that word was meaningful. But Hegel, they complain, insisted in effect that the world was caused by his philosophy, that the changes in physical objects and the historical development of men and institutions were consequences of the self-development of the ideas which he had got from them.⁷

pp. 646 f, 655; also *Gesamtausgabe*, Abt. III, Bd. 1, pp. 125 f, 134 f; Abt. III, Bd. 3, pp. 86 f, 94 f; Abt. III, Bd. 4, pp. 41 f, 243 f, 247 f, these being letters of Marx and Engels of January 7 and 29, 1851, August 2 and 8, 1862, April 22, 1868, November 19 and 26, 1869, to be found in English in *Selected Correspondence* under those dates.

Wherever the original writings have been published in the *Gesamtausgabe*, I shall continue throughout the book to make reference both to them and to the more easily accessible of their English counterparts. All subsequent references to the *Gesamtausgabe* will be in parenthesis, e.g. (I, 5, 269), the first Arabic figure referring to the Band number, and will be followed by references to the corresponding translations. In direct quotation, the conventional translations will be used with only such modifications as seem to promote better English or greater clarity of communication.

⁶ *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 25.

⁷ Cf., below, p. 37. Also Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 25-6; Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*, in *Selected Works*, Vol. I,

If Marx and Engels belabour this point repeatedly, and in many different contexts, it is not merely in order to distinguish themselves from Hegel. For they believed such idealistic alchemy, such transmutation of ideas from consequences of their material matrix into causes of it, to be scientifically obscurantist in the very highest degree and one of the chief intellectual obstacles to a genuine understanding of history and things. Moreover, it was no private vice, they thought, with Hegel but a widespread public evil, an habitual and largely unavoidable practice of "bourgeois" ideologists in general (see below, p. 72). Even self-styled "socialist" writers were capable of indulging in it. They find one of them gravely explaining that man's struggle with nature is based upon the "polar opposition" of particular to universal. Surely, they cry in protest, "polar opposition" is capable of no such miracles. Rather is man's struggle with nature, and other concrete material conflicts, the basis of "polar opposition" which is a mere idea derived from observation of these physical events. An abstraction is made from a fact and then it is claimed that the fact was based on the abstraction. "For example," they satirize, "*Fact*: The cat eats the mouse. *Reflection*: Cat = nature, Mouse = nature; consumption of mouse by cat = consumption of nature by nature = self-consumption of nature. *Philosophic presentation of the fact*: The devouring of the mouse by the cat is based upon the self-consumption of nature." This, they recommend in malicious irony, "is how to proceed if you want to appear German, profound and speculative."⁸

Not speculation, then, they claim, but *nature* is the test of dialectic.⁹ If the goal is science, not sonorous abstraction, it must be come to not by way of theory, but by way of fact. The premises from which they themselves begin, they claim, "are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises, from which abstraction can be made only in the imagination. They are the real individuals,

pp. 419 ff, 430 ff; *On Marx's Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, in *Op. Cit.*, p. 364 f; (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 11 f, 26 f, 40 f, 49 f) *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science (Anti-Dühring)*, International Publishers, N. Y., 1939, pp. 16 f, 30 f, 42 f, 51 f; also (III, 2, 274 f, 282 f, 325 f) *Selected Correspondence*, pp. 102, 103, 113 and 494.

⁸ (I, 5, 465-6) Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, International Publishers, 1939, pp. 114-15.

⁹ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 25) *Anti-Dühring*, p. 29.

their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing, and those produced by their activity. These premises can thus be verified in a purely empirical way.”¹⁰ This empirical commitment, which Marx and Engels make together in one of their earliest joint writings, is one from which, in methodological principle at least, they make no subsequent recession.

Does this then mean that they regarded themselves as “empiricists”? We shall see that in many ways they most decidedly did not. For “British empiricism” and most of its works they have somewhat less than scant respect. Many of the “natural scientists” of the Germany of their day are subjected to their periodic castigation for what they regard as a mechanical, atomistic fact-fetishism, a shallow, enumerative empiricism and phobia for theory which has little in common with what they themselves consider to be proper science. And of course the sensationalism, subjectivism, and other “idealistic baggage” which their empirical contemporaries so often carried as ontological accoutrement to their methodological equipment, was wholly alien to their way of thought; Marx and Engels are not idealists, but materialists, which would, in this particular reference, and in more modern terminology, mean physical realists. Moreover, they are *dialectical* materialists, and dialectics, however they themselves may have modified its earlier interpretation, springs in historic fact from the German systematic, not the British positive, tradition. All of this we shall have frequent occasion to remark in the pages that follow, where we shall also encounter their vigorous defenses, particularly against positivistic and empirical assaults, of “theory,” of “rational thought,” of “proper philosophy” as methodologically indispensable to science. In short, we shall see precisely where they took issue with much of the empiricism of their day, and why they were disposed in certain contexts to be chary of the very word.

But none of this changes the fact, which emerges unmistakably from any objective and comprehensive examination of their own writings, that Marx and Engels themselves largely practiced, al-

¹⁰ (I, 5, 10) *The German Ideology*, pp. 6-7.

most always preached, and quite invariably considered themselves as committed to, an approach to the problems of man and human society that is much more nearly consonant with what is today regarded as the "factual" method of modern empirical science, than with the "a priori" or deductive one of traditional speculative and systematic philosophy in any of its historic forms. If their understanding of the general character of human change *is* systematically involved with — that is to say, *does* follow logically, and hence is properly deducible from, their philosophies of nature and society — and for the sake of the present systematizing enterprise it is indeed to be hoped that it does — this, they never tire of insisting, is precisely because the latter are themselves merely factual generalizations from such empirical actualities as the former. If their philosophy asserts that all of nature is a process and that all the elements in it interact, then obviously this must, systematically, be likewise true of man; if their social theory implies that history is on progressive march, then, logically, men are on the march of progress too, for men, their relations, powers, and behaviour are all — as we shall see them ultimately arguing — that constitute society and social history; and finally, if the socialist ideal is to be striven for in order that men may become better than they are today, then clearly and admittedly Marx and Engels saw socialism as entailing change in men. But to deduce these data syllogistically from the premises asserted is an exact reversal of what they claim to be the proper, and their own, method of procedure. If they relied on Hegel for the forms of dialectic, this, they say, was because they knew, whether Hegel did or not, that he himself derived them from the world, from the transformations and causal interconnections daily brought to light by historians and scientists: the change from water to gas by electrolysis, the change from seed to plant in growth, the change, in historical development, from molten matter to solid earth, from ape to man, from spear-thrower to bombardier, from witch-doctor to brain-surgeon. "It is from the history of nature and of human society," says Engels, "that the laws of dialectic are abstracted. For they are nothing but the most

general laws of these two aspects of historical development.”¹¹ This holds, for Marx and Engels, whether the generalizations were achieved by their “systematic” predecessors in happy speculative accident, or by themselves “scientifically,” and with conscious empirical rigour.

It must be recognized then, that whatever change or development occurs in their views on the problem of method, they remain both consistent and vigorously insistent, from their earliest writings through their latest, in their repudiation of speculative, a priori, and deductive procedures, and in their belief that proper science, which they believed their own to be, should take its departure from facts, not principles, and should derive its generalizations, conclusions or laws only in strictest reference to these facts. “Empirical observation must in each separate case bring out empirically, and without any mystification and speculation . . .”¹² is a phrase quite characteristic of those they use repeatedly in approaching problems, or, “. . . any anticipation of results yet to be proved appears to me to be disturbing, and the reader who desires to follow me must be resolved to ascend from the particular to the general,”¹³ or, again, “The family . . . must then be treated and analyzed according to the existing empirical data, not according to ‘the concept of the family’ as is the custom in Germany,”¹⁴ or, “We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate . . .”¹⁵ etc., etc. The texts are so full of such specific commitments to empirical procedure that to list even a substantial part of them would merely tax the reader’s tolerance for redundancy. So let it merely be stated here for subsequent illustration in contexts more centrally connected with our anthropological problem, that however “outside” opinion shall finally come to judge them in these matters, they regarded themselves, in relation no

¹¹ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 500) *Dialectics of Nature*, International Publishers, New York, 1940, p. 26.

¹² (I, 5, 15) *The German Ideology*, p. 13.

¹³ Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, in *Karl Marx, Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 354.

¹⁴ (I, 5, 18) *The German Ideology*, p. 17.

¹⁵ (I, 5, 15) *Ibid.*, p. 14.

less to specific problems than to general methodological principles, not as speculative theorists but as empirical scientists, and they are willing to sum up the commitments they adopt in employing the historical materialist method in these words: "This method of approach is not devoid of premises. It starts out from the real premises and does not abandon them for a moment. Its premises are men, not in any fantastic isolation or definition, but in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions."¹⁶

In their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions, then, men, it seemed factually obvious to Marx and Engels, were causally interactive with an environment and changed. Since these were assertedly not deductions from theory but matters of historical evidence, we must obviously try to discover what Marx and Engels conceived the content of historical evidence to be. What grounds did they have, a century ago, in the face of such widespread opinion to the contrary, for making these statements as "facts"?

¹⁶ (I, 5, 16) *Ibid.*, p. 15.

CHAPTER II

Human Change in Fact

LET US TAKE the problem in parts. Two "facts" are up to be tested for their nineteenth-century scientific sanctions. One is fairly simple: that "human nature" changes. The other is enormously complex: that "human nature" changes, amongst all possible ways, in certain particular ways and not in others. In order to achieve whatever simplicity is possible in presentation, let us leave the complex question for detailed consideration in the second section of the book, and attend in this part only to the simpler one — what scientific evidence had Marx and Engels that humans change at all?

Interestingly enough, they found their most general assurance in the inorganic sciences — astronomy, physics, chemistry, thermodynamics and geology. A hundred years ago when they began to formulate their theories, the idea that the cosmos had a past was relatively young in modern thought. By past, of course, is meant not merely temporal past whose eons are ticked off by the incessant repetition of the same celestial process — this mechanistic notion had indeed held sway since Newton — but an actual, historical past, like society and culture, involving genesis, development, and perhaps decline. But though young, perhaps not older than a century, the idea had been powerfully nourished by a good deal of serious research, and had already certified as scientific "facts" two propositions that left no room for viewing immutability and permanence as properties of man. The first was that there was once an epoch in planetary history when no men existed. The second was that there was once an epoch when not even life existed, when atmospheric and thermodynamic conditions were such that it would have been chemically impossible for life of any kind, not to speak of human life, to have arisen or to maintain itself. The implication seemed to be without much question that life was not an essence but a natural development from an inorganic matrix.¹⁷

¹⁷ Stating accurately the position of the science of his time, which, except for subsequent progress made in learning of the "chemical conditions" he refers to, is approximately the same today, Engels asserts that only when "the temperature is so

Moreover, the Clausian formula for entropy, enunciated at just about this time,¹⁸ had already begun to inspire theoretical physicists to the direst sort of conjectures about the final fate of the universe. The cosmos itself seemed destined to ultimate demise in thermo-stasis, and in any case the earth's own temperature was certain eventually to be not above, but below, that which permits of life's survival.¹⁹ Protoplasm, in short, having made an entrance on the cosmic scene, seemed scheduled for an exit after a while. And this, Marx and Engels thought, if there were nothing else, is change.

But there was a good deal else, even in Marx's day. If those sciences which showed that the cosmos itself was historical in character assured them in general terms that life, and therefore "human" life was not immutable, the organic sciences made matters more specific. Marx's day was Darwin's day as well, and evolutionary theory was savouring the sweetness of fact. In the same year (1859) in which Marx published his revolutionary *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Darwin brought forth his revolutionary contribution to the understanding of biological economy, *The Origin of Species*. Engels, who seems to have been acquainted with most of the theoretical anticipations of Darwinism, read it almost immediately and wrote to Marx about it. Within a matter of not very many months, Marx, in letters first to Engels,²⁰ then to Lassalle,²¹ has paid it such obvi-

far equalized that over at least a considerable portion of the earth's surface it does not exceed the limits within which protein is capable of life, then, if other chemical conditions are favorable, is living protoplasm formed. What these conditions are we do not yet know. . . ." (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 492-3) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 16.

¹⁸ 1850, to be exact. This formulation of Sadi Carnot's earlier principle states that in an isolated system the entropy, which is to say the amount of energy unavailable for work, tends toward a maximum, or, popularly, that heat cannot pass of its own accord from a colder to a hotter body. As the second law of thermo-dynamics, this is one of the basic principles on which that science, and with it much of modern physico-chemical practice, rests.

¹⁹ Engels' vivid imagination was touched as much as anyone's by these gloomy prospects of the universal coming of nothing, and it is evidence, however small, of genuine scientific sobriety on his part that he ever managed at all — for neither he nor others were often able to — to put the matter as restrainedly as this: "The present position of natural science predicts a possible end for the earth, and for its habitability a fairly certain one." *Ludwig Feuerbach, Op. Cit.*, p. 422. For one of Engels' rather more purple passages on the subject, see (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 495) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 20.

²⁰ (III, 2, 533) *Selected Correspondence*, p. 126.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

ously earnest, if not affectedly modest, compliments as these: "this is the book which contains the basis in natural history for our view"; and "Darwin's book is very important and serves me as a basis in natural science for the class-struggle in history . . . not only is the death-blow dealt here for the first time to 'teleology' in the natural sciences but their rational meaning is empirically explained."

In its proper place we must show where Marx and Engels differed with Darwin — for they did on several rather crucial points (pp. 63–5 below). The object here is merely to discover the various biological sources for their conviction that human transformation was a fact.

Their correspondence of the eight years following *The Origin of Species* shows a continued attention to evolutionary problems and a lively and knowledgeable interest in the growing literature concerning them. But it remained for Engels, in the subsequent decade, to take up with more serious intent and concentration the study of the natural sciences as a whole and to try to make some Marxian integration of their established data. It was a gigantic undertaking which he never completed, but portions of the work were put in fairly finished shape and these, together with his notes for other parts, have been published as *Dialectics of Nature*. That his knowledge of the century's developments in biological science was remarkably extensive is evident from this book and from his approximately contemporaneous *Anti-Dühring*. What always interests him most, and what he is continually underlining for purposes of theory, is the growingly incontrovertible evidence against any of the traditional notions of the fixity of species. He says for example in a summary passage, that, according to the classical Linnaean view, "the species of plants and animals had been established once for all when they came into existence; like continually produced like, and it was already a good deal for Linnaeus to have conceded that possibly new species could have arisen here and there by crossing. In contrast to the history of mankind, which develops in time, there was ascribed to the history of nature only an unfolding in space. All change, all development in nature, was denied. Natural science,

so revolutionary at the outset, suddenly found itself confronted by an out-and-out conservative nature in which even today everything was as it had been at the beginning and in which — to the end of the world or for all eternity — everything would remain as it had been since the beginning.”²² But such notions, he goes on to show, could not long withstand the pressure of scientific fact. If astronomy, geology, physics, and chemistry initiated the onslaught against them, biology soon stepped in to finish it. Revolutionary developments in paleontology, anatomy, physiology and microscopy, the discovery of the cell, the application of the comparative method in physical geography, botany and zoology — all this he shows, left nothing standing of the classical view. “The more deeply and exactly this research was carried on,” he concludes, “the more did the rigid system of an immutable, fixed organic nature crumble away at its touch. Not only did the separate species of animals and plants become more and more inextricably intermingled, but animals turned up, such as *Amphioxus* and *Lepidosiren*, that made a mockery of all previous classification, and finally organisms were encountered of which it was not possible to say whether they belonged to the plant or animal kingdom. More and more the gaps in the paleontological record were filled, compelling even the most reluctant to acknowledge the striking parallelism between the evolutionary history of the world as a whole and that of the individual organism. . . . It was characteristic that, almost simultaneously with Kant’s attack on the eternity of the solar system, C. F. Wolff in 1759 launched the first attack²³ on the fixity of the species and proclaimed the theory of descent. But what in his case was only a brilliant anticipation took firm shape in the hands of Oken, Lamarck, Baer, and was victoriously carried through by Darwin in 1859, exactly a hundred years later. Almost simultaneously it was established that protoplasm and the cell, which had already been shown to be the ultimate morphological constituents of all organisms, occurred independently as the lowest forms of organic life. This not only reduced the gulf between inorganic and organic nature to the minimum, but removed one of the most essential difficul-

²² (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 485) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 6.

²³ Engels errs here. Wolff’s was by no means the earliest such conception.

ties that had previously stood in the way of the theory of the descent of organisms. The new conception of nature was complete in its main features; all rigidity was dissolved, all fixity dissipated, all particularity that had been regarded as eternal became transient, the whole of nature shown as moving in eternal flux and cyclical course.”²⁴

The natural sciences, then, both inorganic and organic, Marx and Engels saw as largely committed to change. Was the same true of social science, the field of their particular interest? In general it seemed moving in a similar direction. Much conventional history, to be sure, was still being written and taught on old idealistic or mechanical presuppositions — that human society was created by a divine being in the form which it has largely maintained; subsequently, or, more frequently, of course, that it was “agreed upon” at a certain stage in human development by a conclave of previously anarchical primitives who decided that co-operation was more profitable than conflict. Nevertheless, the Romantics, Hegel, Comte and others had branded social theory with the concepts of genesis and development, and the infant sciences of sociology and anthropology were making revolutionary contributions to the body of actual fact. Whatever reorientation history was actually undergoing, Marx and Engels attribute to the same general forces which had already produced such important changes in the concepts and data of the physical and biological sciences. In any case a new empirical spirit, as well as a disposition to consider social and historical matters in terms of change and even evolution, was coming to the fore. Engels himself claims that “Up to the beginning of the sixties, a history of the family cannot be spoken of. This branch of historical science was then entirely under the influence of the decalogue. The patriarchal form of the family, described more exhaustively by Moses than by anybody else, was not only, without further comment, considered as the most ancient, but also as identical with the family of our times. No historical development of the family was even recognized.”²⁵ Engels here exaggerates the be-

²⁴ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 490-1) *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

²⁵ *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (see following footnote), Kerr, Chicago, 1902, p. 13.

nightedness of the first half of the century, but on the whole his emphasis is proper, for during the second half matters were definitely different. Old assumptions about the uniformity of historical epochs and the essential similarity of cultural and human behaviour patterns were being methodically laid aside. Students were trying to get at the actual facts of earlier times, partly by analogy with the "actual, empirically observable behaviour of real men" in such of the currently existing primitive societies as had escaped the impact of modern western civilization — partly by turning, with new objectivity and historical awareness, to the classics of antiquity, in the hope of finding accurate reflections therein of the social and cultural conditions obtaining in the epochs which produced them.

In short, while Marx and Engels showed earlier interest than did many in the work of modern anthropology's pioneers,²⁶ and gave it perhaps readier support — for they found in it a rich new source of verifying evidence for the views they were developing — the realization spread pretty generally amongst historians and social scientists after the middle of the century that earlier times and different circumstances had witnessed quite radically different social, sexual, moral, familial, economic and cultural organizations and conventions than those characterizing modern civilization — in short, that men have changed in more particular respects than in that of their status as cosmic elements or organic species.

Now in connection with these sociological and anthropological matters, a question arises which the data of the natural sci-

²⁶ Three figures seemed especially significant to them: McLennan of Britain, who investigated the native tribes of Australia; the American, Lewis Henry Morgan, who went to live with the Iroquois Indians, was adopted into the tribe, and wrote of his findings in volumes which represented the first in what was to become the great literature of the American school of anthropology; and the German Bachofen, who, in his compendious *Mutterrecht*, produced evidence of periods in ancient Asiatic and Greek society of non-monogamous sexual conventions and consequent gynaeocracy or "woman rule." Morgan particularly seemed to confirm historical materialist theory in extraordinary detail, and Marx projected a historical treatise incorporating his evidence. Pressure of other duties prevented its accomplishment, however, and the task fell, as did so many others, to Engels, who, in 1884 published, with the help of Marx's critical notes, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, a revolutionary interpretation of ancient and pre-history based largely on the researches of Bachofen, McLennan and Morgan, but borrowing freely from Latham, Westermarck, Bancroft, Agassiz, Mommsen, *et al.*, and exhibiting an unexpectedly extensive knowledge of ancient Greek and Roman texts.

ences did not necessarily present us with. Granting the competence of the evidence — and in view of what sociology has subsequently amassed this can no longer but be granted — assuming then, that enormous differences have actually taken place in human customs, ideologies, arts, methods of production, institutional forms, religious, ethical, legal and political norms and precepts — what bearing has this all on “human nature”? That man’s behaviour changes is obvious enough, but need this necessarily reflect in any central way on man himself? Why, through all the vagaries that this behaviour undergoes from time to time and place to place, could not the human “essence” remain one?

In one sense, of course, this is merely the anthropological expression of the perennial “Being *versus* Becoming,” and “One *versus* Many,” controversies with which philosophers have struggled since ancient times. Marx and Engels never gave them serious analytical attention because they were not interested in “metaphysical,” “abstract,” and “impractical” subjects. But for the sake of understanding what they themselves meant by man, and because the problems do have a certain methodological bearing on current cultural theory in general, we should obviously try to discover to what possible positions they may be committed in respect, say, to a specific question such as this: “Granting fully that man’s behaviour is highly varied and constantly changing, must there not at the same time remain a ‘permanent,’ an absolute, single, and changeless entity that is man?”

It is obvious at the outset that their empirical standards, their commitments to “real men in their actual, empirical process of development under definite conditions,” leave them little leeway if they mean to be consistent, for distinguishing between human behaviour and what “man” is? If human behaviour changes, so — should they not say — does “man”? They are, of course, in a position to argue that while scientifically the “human essence” is nothing to take departure from, it is perhaps a valid entity to be concluded to. But while, to the extent that they had no more than mere empirical commitments, they would have to agree formally with such a possibility, they do not themselves actually

volunteer any such suggestion. They were clearly loath to make even so explicit a concession as this, however meager it is, to tolerance of an "absolute" humanity.

In *Ludwig Feuerbach*, and throughout Part II of *The German Ideology*, they inveigh specifically and with considerable vigour against the very notion of an *Allgemeines*, an abstract "*Gattung*" of this sort — it is an entity, they seem to feel, with neither present scientific status nor promise of future one. And the particular content given to this imagined *Gattung* by various of the Young Hegelians who affect earnest gestures to "reality," is of no possible service to "truth." Neither the *Wesen* of Feuerbach, the abstract human genus, nor, for example, Stirner's '*Einziger*, the pure, individualized self, are, in their opinion, any less chimeric and "metaphysical" than the religio-idealistic concepts they pretend to be supplanting.

As to the innumerable other "constants" which stood as the milestones of "progress" in the speculations of the great classical philosophers on man's nature — the "universal man" which Plato and Aristotle created out of the image of the Athenian philosopher, Descartes' rational individualist of the *Cogito ergo sum*, the *spiraculum vitae* of Renaissance humanism, Rousseau's "noble savage," etc. — these, it would appear, are merely more of the "chimeras, ideas, dogmas, imaginary beings from the yoke of which" they proposed, in the opening paragraph of *The German Ideology*, to liberate anthropological science. Clearly it was not merely the radical costume changes which, between its successive historical bows, the human genus indulged in that were irksome to Marx and Engels — it was the human genus itself. When Marx says explicitly that "the human essence (*das menschliche Wesen*) is no abstraction inherent in each separate individual. In its reality it is the *ensemble* of the social relations,"²⁷ he is taking an unambiguous position on the issue: man can be no more than what men actually do in their concrete historical and social environments.

So much, then, for their beliefs about the metaphysical *existence* of a single human genus. Do their views permit acceptance

²⁷ (I, 5, 535) Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, 472-3.

of the concept as a methodological convenience, as a serviceable hypothesis for the anthropological sciences to proceed upon? Such acceptance would tend to be somewhat discouraged, at least, by their general views on the nature of ideology and their theory of the class conditioning of human ideation. Long before Marx and Engels lived, Francis Bacon had remarked as dominant among his Idols of the Tribe, the universal egocentric tendency of the human mind to feign and suppose "all other things to be somehow, though it cannot see how, similar to those few things by which it is surrounded." In its anthropological reference, this tendency has been recognized by modern students as "ethnocentrism," and the Marxian theory of ideology is, in one of its aspects, merely an extension of the same, originally Baconian, notion to include class-centric as well as egocentric and ethnocentric consciousness. Now if social science was to be "liberated" from the "phantoms" and "chimeras" haunting it out of the past, and those that would clamour for creation in the future, it would appear that it must sever not only all metaphysical, but any crucial methodological, attachment to the concept of a general human essence. For it would follow from the "class-projective" and generally provincial character which Marx and Engels ascribed to the ideational process, that just as Darwin, whatever his merits otherwise, built his animal kingdom in the image of the British bourgeoisie,²⁸ and the Young Hegelians, their variegated versions of the human *Allgemeines* in the nationalistic pattern of "the German,"²⁹ so would any other anthropological pronouncement that commenced with "All men" as a subject, be apt to conclude with a predicate that said, in effect, "Like us." *Das Allgemeine* would to this extent therefore, be, in the Marxian view, no methodological convenience, but an obstacle to scientific truth. At worst, then, evidently, it should be used with utmost circumspection, and at best not used at all; "real active men" and their "real life-processes" remain more suitable points of departure for anthropological science than any abstract concepts or general definitions.

²⁸ See below, p. 64.

²⁹ (I, 5, 28-33) *The German Ideology*, pp. 30-5.

This aspect of Marx's and Engels' methodological position is strongly suggestive, to me at least, of the one which, as represented by such men as George Mead, for example, has generally become known today as "social behaviourism." And it is doubtless for reasons with which Mead would sympathize, that Marx and Engels do not themselves, except in the earliest works, speak very much of "human *nature*"! The "nature" of a thing, as contrasted, say, with its "nurture," probably suggested to them the absolute and constant "essence" of the thing, as contrasted with its particular manifestations and changing expressions, and neither their "behaviourism" nor their belief in the primacy of change would favour such distinctions for their theory of man. It is true that before their day Kant had observed some finer shades of meaning than the Scholastics had previously established for these terms, and had managed to separate *Natur* from *Wesen* — the one as being empirically, the other as merely ideally, determined. But there seems no evidence that Marx and Engels knew this, or would have been keenly interested if they did: neither their *forte* nor their temptations lay in the conceptual analysis of abstract categories. Moreover, even with benefit of the Kantian distinction, human *nature* would have tended generally then as it does now, to signify, if not an absolute and metaphysical "mankind," at least the common attributes that groups of living human beings share rather than their variations and mutations, and Marx and Engels usually wanted to lay major stress upon the latter. So, when they do speak generally of human "nature" in any spirit other than ironic, or when we ourselves, as we shall very often do, employ that term as roughly equivalent in meaning to their "man" (*Mensch*), their "human" (*menschlich*), or their "human existence" (*menschlichen Existenz*), it must never be understood as signifying the "absolute essence" as contrasted with the "accidents" of the human, or its permanence as contrasted with its change. Rather must it be understood as its "*history*." "*Die Geschichte der Menschheit*," the *history* of humanity, is a Marxian expression which is in itself suggestive of both the variety and the change Marx and Engels

saw in men, and it is this historical connotation that must be read into the term human *nature* as it will be used thereafter.

So much for the meaning of *nature* in the phrase which makes the title of this book. Now what of the meaning of *human*? What of "humanity" itself, whose "nature" Marx and Engels interpret as its history? When they think it reasonably evident that no abstract *Wesen* is the burden of their argument, they will use these terms interchangeably with "concrete men." We will even encounter occasional references, in their exhortative writings, to *genuinely* human being, to *really* human history, to *truly* human morality. And before this we will find them actually essaying a general "definition" of the human, though it is doubtful that they set much greater store by it than they do by any other definitions: they regard them all as empty, over-simple, inadequately communicative of the factually real. But what in any case did they ultimately mean by human?

Insofar as we may have here a problem requiring a bit of analytical illumination rather than a mere historical question whose answer will emerge in great detail in the pages that follow, it is one for empiricists, behaviourists, and relativists in general, not merely for Marx and Engels. The problem, if such it be, is that of ordinary substantive meaning. Specifically referring to the subject matter of this study, if one cannot speak validly of "man" until anthropological science shall have established empirically a universal law or set of absolutes informing the apparent relativity of cultures and behaviour, what then can be meant, in even the most unpretentious usage, by "human"? What, in fact, is any empirical anthropology the science of? — not wolf-packs, ape-hordes, or societies of ants admittedly, but what? Even if the factor of change were left out of consideration, there would still remain to be determined the empirical, behaviouristic grounds, other than those of mere animal biology, on which Marx and Engels ever speak of human — not to mention "truly," "genuinely," "really," or "by definition," human.

Their situation here is generally less difficult, though much the same in kind, as that of most empirical anthropologists today —

even those who refrain more scrupulously than did Marx and Engels from talk of "truly," "really," "genuinely," or "by definition" human. Modern cultural relativism can be far more radical than Marx and Engels ever dreamed of making theirs. Many contemporary anthropologists, for example,⁸⁰ tend to place their various cultural configurations on levels of such total mutual unrelatedness that the hope of finding possible steps between them seems deliberately discouraged. Within such a methodological framework⁸¹ it is easy to feel somewhat at a loss for grounds on which to identify collectively, the members of the various groups as "human." From the standpoint of practical science, this is perhaps of no great importance. The relativists would probably claim that their interest is in cultural facts, not abstract concepts, that they know "cultures" when they see them and they need no verbal definitions to facilitate such recognition. If pressed for a definition of the general object of their several studies, "man," they would probably venture, somewhat tautologically, perhaps, but with adequate consistency and empirical discretion, that man is the animal with culture.

Marx's and Engels' problem is, I think, certainly no more serious than this. They attack not ordinary substantive meaning, but abstract metaphysical entities. Their intolerance for absolute and eternal essences does not extend to relative, historical "constants," to empirical common denominators which emerge for sufficiently long periods of historical time to furnish the ordinary social meanings for nouns. Their own "definition" of the human subject of their enquiries is not "the cultural animal," but as we shall see (pp. 65-9, 74), it is no more intended to be metaphysically definitive than is this one; they do not wish to put an end with it to possible development in either the "nature" or the meaning of the "human."

Between the Marxian and such modern relativism as we have been considering, there are, however, divergences as important to our problem as are the similarities. While both relate the differ-

⁸⁰ Influenced by anti-evolutionary teachings such as Lowie's, often, and by Ruth Benedict's configurationist and anti-atomistic views.

⁸¹ Which almost suggests a return to "atomistic" conceptions on a magnified or "cultural" scale.

ences between human beings to differences in their cultural and social configurations, and are united in "cultural relativism" in this respect, the modern relativists see no uniform relations between the cultures themselves, and — except for the one to which we have referred, that they are made up of cultural animals — find in them no general common denominator. This is not true in Marx's and Engels' case. They not only refer differences in men to differences in their cultures but, as we shall have ample occasion to see in detail, they reduce cultural differences themselves to differences at what seems to them the more basic level of social production. And observable here, they believe, are certain uniformities and patterns of transformation that are generalizable into actual laws. Thus society for them is not a congeries of isolated "cultures" but a lawful whole, and whether they are right or wrong, the problem of the meaning of the human is in any case rendered simpler. Moreover, in the full spirit of nineteenth-century evolutionism, they accept not only Darwinism, which gives their "human beings" full continuity of development as organic species — most modern anthropologists would find no great quarrel here — but — and here there would be quarrel — social and cultural evolution along with biological. Marx and Engels see the productive base, on which all cultural "superstructures" appear to them to rest, as itself undergoing transformation — slow, but, over long enough periods, verifiable, and continuous and evolutionary in kind. Whether "social truth" will finally come to rest with Marx or the anti-evolutionists on such matters, if "truth" ever comes to "rest," the advantage meanwhile will seem to lie with Marx on the simple question of meaning. Just as human *beings* are human, biologically speaking, because the innumerable changing, varied individuals which constitute the "species" are linked together in a single, continuous evolutionary movement from tree-climbing anthropoid to some future unknown form, so human *nature* is human, socially speaking, because all historic individuals and groups are commonly determined in their variegated and changing cultural behaviour, by conditions in the social production of their particular time and place, and these conditions themselves are

merely links in the total evolutionary continuum of productive modes from "gentile" to "socialist" forms, and to unknown forms beyond. It is in this double sense, biological and cultural, that "human nature" means for Marx and Engels, the history of evolving mankind.

When we find Marx and Engels speaking of "truly," "genuinely" and "really" human, we will be concerned with different interests and different linguistic intentions. Here their usage is primarily normative and directive, functioning on the one hand in support of their "humanist" ethics, and on the other, as an expression of the practical or "productive" principle which enters into their theory of human knowledge, both of which we shall examine at some length in the final chapter. But in no case should their "ethical" references to the human, be understood as intended to qualify either their behaviourism or their rejection of absolute essences. Their interest, after all, was in directing the change that occurs in men into desirable channels. They employ concepts of the "genuinely human" to this end, to inspire men not to some abstract or absolute ideal, but merely to a fuller realization of those capacities which, since they see man actually possessing them in present historical time, they feel able to incorporate as elements, among others, in his substantive definition. Their overall ethical goal, of course, was amelioration of the human lot. And there is one very real sense in which all their scientific, methodological, philosophical and ethical equipment, their empiricism, behaviourism, relativism, humanism, etc., can be considered as carefully selected instruments to that end. But the very real sense in question is not this: that they preferred "historical action" to "historical truth," or that they were social reformers rather than social scientists. It is, on the contrary, that they honestly thought "historical truth" something to be made while being understood, and something ultimately understandable only when being made. With this basic epistemological conviction, they naturally aspired to make it as "good" as possible within the confines of its understandability. But these are matters for later exposition.

Meanwhile what can we say in summary about the contents

of this chapter? If we understand the meanings Marx and Engels had for human nature, whether we subscribe to them or not, this much can, I think, be safely said: that although by no means all of last century's unassorted evidence pointed with simple and unequivocal insistence to each single generalization that they drew, they would today feel themselves more than justified in claiming that the best of it, the "facts" which have endured the test of time and subsequent empirical correlation and amplification by physics, biology and the various social sciences, bespoke at least the following propositions clearly: that the mutability of "human nature," in their behaviouristic meaning for it, is an historic fact; that the human being, in both its biological and social status, has done considerable changing in the past; that its current condition was evidently one of transformation; and that if past and present are indicative of the future, it would continue to change still further in the countless generations remaining to it before its highly probable consignment to a Clausian grave.

Let us then accept the fact of change in "human nature" and turn a curious and perhaps self-interested eye on what, if Marx and Engels correctly understood the human situation, the precise *modus operandi* of human transformation consists in. First we shall glance briefly at the role of human change in Marxian social and philosophical theory in general, so as to be properly equipped to understand the details of its functional and interactive dialectics with nature and society as Part II exhibits them.

CHAPTER III

Human Change in Theory I: Historical Materialism

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM is the name which Marx and Engels gave to their theory of society and history. What this theory is, we shall shortly consider in detail. In the present chapter we want merely to get some general view of it, primarily in its relation to the "empirical truth" of human change.

Like that truth itself, Marx and Engels regard the theory in question as no mere speculative construction, fideist revelation, or "opportunist" weapon for the realization of their socialist goal, but as a practical generalization from history, in this case a statement of the laws which they think are actually to be observed in operation in the transformation of human beings and their institutions, and to be "governing" the process of social movement.

If one may properly judge the intended Marxian emphasis by the standard of insistent repetition, the cornerstone of the theory is certainly this: that of all the factors determining historical development, "the decisive element is pre-eminently the production and reproduction of life and its material requirements. This implies, on the one hand," according to Engels, "the production of the means of existence (food, clothing, shelter and the necessary tools); on the other hand, the generation of children, the propagation of species."³² In other words, as Marx and Engels jointly put the matter,³³ ". . . the first premise of all human existence, and therefore of all history [is] that men must be in a position to live in order to be able to 'make history.' But life involves before anything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself. And indeed this is an historical act, a fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years ago,

³² *Origin of the Family*, pp. 9-10.

³³ (I, 5, 17) *The German Ideology*, p. 16.

must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life."

The point seems such an obvious truism that one wonders why Marx and Engels felt bound to make so much of it as they did. Again and again they repeat it, sometimes varying the expression, sometimes not. And in his very short speech at the graveside of Karl Marx, Engels, who had the whole long record of Marx's life and remarkable accomplishments to draw examples from, selected merely this point and one other (surplus value) as being the two cardinal discoveries of his old friend's genius. "Just as Darwin discovered the law of evolution in organic nature," he says, "so Marx discovered the law of evolution in human history; he discovered the simple fact, hitherto concealed by an overgrowth of ideology, that mankind must first of all eat and drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue politics, religion, science, art, etc.; and that therefore the production of the immediate material means of subsistence and consequently the degree of economic development attained by a given people or during a given epoch, form the foundation upon which the state institutions, the legal conceptions, the art and even the religious ideas of the people concerned have been evolved, and in the light of which these things must be explained, instead of vice versa as had hitherto been the case."⁸⁴

Why were they so insistent on this point? Why did they belabour it until it almost acquired the penumbra of an *idée* — or platitude — *fixe*? The reason, a more than sufficient one for them, is contained fully in the last phrase of Engels' statement — "instead of vice versa as had hitherto been the case." Theretofore, he and Marx believed, historians almost without exception had practiced the same idealistic alchemy as had philosophers, quite ignoring the material preconditions of any thought whatsoever and portraying history as though it were dancing to the tune of men's ideas — usually, as with Carlyle, those of individual geniuses. This view they considered "bourgeois" ideology, obscurantist, and though silly, so widespread a public vice that

⁸⁴ *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 16.

no amount of opposition to it, however repetitious, could be too much.

As it turned out, however, this very emphasis, this insistence on an "economic base" to which ideal and cultural affairs are "superstructural" was responsible for a good deal of subsequent misconstruction of historical materialism. Marx and Engels themselves, later in life realized this and tried to mend matters, partly by corrective statements, partly by pointing to the elements of their theory that make it patently impossible to think of them as "monists," "mechanists," "economic determinists" — species all for which they truly had as profound a scientific distaste as they had for "spiritists," "idealists" and "finalists."

Since we must, if we are to understand historical materialism, adjust ourselves eventually to ideas of pluralism and causal interaction, we may as well make such dialectical approach to it at once. Though the production of the means of life is, by their own admission and insistence, the decisive factor in historical movement and social transformation, it is by no means — in fact or in Marx's and Engels' view of fact — the only element operating causally. "Political, juridical, philosophical, religious, literary, artistic, etc., development is based on economic development. But all these," Engels points out, "react upon one another and also upon the economic base. It is not that the economic position is the *cause and alone active*, while everything else has only a passive effect. There is, rather, interaction on the basis of the economic necessity, which *ultimately* always asserts itself."⁸⁵ Putting the matter more elaborately and somewhat more specifically, he writes again: "According to the materialist conception of history the determining element . . . is *ultimately* the production and reproduction in real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. If therefore somebody twists this into the statement that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure — political forms of the class struggle and its consequences, constitutions established by the

⁸⁵ Letter to H. Starkenburg, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 517.

victorious class after a successful battle, forms of law, and then even the reflexes of all these in the minds of the combatants: political, legal, philosophical theories, religious ideas and their further development into systems of dogma — also exercise their influence upon the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their *form*. There is an interaction of all these elements in which, amid all the endless *hosts* of accidents, . . . the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary . . . there are innumerable intersecting forces, an infinite series of parallelograms of forces which give rise to one resultant — the historical event . . . Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that younger writers sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasize this main principle in opposition to our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to allow the other elements involved in the interaction to come into their rights.”⁸⁶

This is blunt and specific statement. It repudiates all mechanistic or “reductive” views of history’s determination. But on the positive side, it is scarcely specific enough to make the reader feel confident about precisely what it is he has to go on. Many factors have been mentioned here as operative in the causal field. Exactly how they operate, particularly in the transforming of human beings, what relative importance in the social process is to be attributed to each, and what efficacy man himself possesses in this constellation of interactive causes, are matters far from clear. Engels intended no more in this brief letter: he urges his correspondent “to study this theory further from its original sources and not at second hand, it is really much easier.” This, then, is precisely what we ourselves will undertake to do in chapters five through eleven, restricting ourselves here to obtaining, as economically as possible, an idea of the role played in it by the simple Marxian conception that human nature changes.

The economical way of doing this is not the happiest. There is a single, longish paragraph in *The German Ideology* which contains all we need to know, both about the problem at hand,

⁸⁶ Letter to Bloch, *Selected Correspondence*, pp. 475-7.

and about the general orientation of the theory. Unfortunately, it is particularly rigid writing in the German original, and the best rendering one can make of it in English, whatever liberties one takes, is scarcely English. Since our objectives here are economy and understanding, however, and not felicity of style, let us hear their summary statement of their theory. "Our conception of history," they say, "depends on our ability to expound the actual process of production, starting out from the simple material production of life, and to comprehend, as the basis of all history, the various forms and stages of social intercourse connected with and created by this production . . . further, to show it in action as the State; and so, proceeding from this basis in material production, to explain all theoretical production likewise, to trace the origins and growth of the various forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics, etc., etc. Thus can the totality of the situation be exhibited (and correlatively the reciprocal action of these various components on one another). Unlike the idealistic view of history, our materialist view does not need to look for a category in every period, but remains constantly on the real ground of history; it does not explain practice in terms of the idea but explains the formation of the idea in terms of practice, and consequently it concludes that mere mental criticism, mere resolution into 'self-consciousness' or transformation into 'apparitions,' 'spectres,' 'fancies' of the forms and products of consciousness are quite incapable of dissolving them, that this task can be accomplished only by the practical overthrow of the actual social relations from which all such idealistic humbug springs; that revolution, not criticism, is the driving force not only of history, but of religion, philosophy, and all other types of theory as well. It shows that one cannot put an end to history by resolving it into 'self-consciousness' as 'spirit of the spirit,' but that at each stage one finds in it material results: a sum of productive forces, a historically created relation of individuals to nature and to one another which are handed down to each generation from its predecessor, a collection of productive forces, different forms of capital and other material conditions, which indeed, on the one hand is modified by the new

generation, but on the other, prescribes for it its conditions of life and gives it a definite development, a special character. Our view shows that circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances.”²⁷

Here Marx and Engels elaborate, among other things, what they are constrained to state repeatedly in summary form throughout their writings, that while “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness,”²⁸ and while “men are products of circumstances and upbringing and . . . therefore changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing,” it must never be forgotten that “circumstances are changed precisely by men and that the educator himself must be educated.”²⁹

In short — and this is the central thing to recognize about the relation between historical materialist theory and change in human nature — it is basic to the whole Marxian concept of society that man changes history and is thereby himself changed, and that, in this sense, all history is really nothing but a continual transformation of human nature.

All that has been discussed so far concerns those aspects of historical materialist theory which deal with the past and the present. What then, of the future? Was this a concern of Marxism? It was indeed. Marx and Engels were interested in socialism, which was not yet an historical reality, even in a single country. They believed, to boot, that the uniformity which held in nature to the extent of enabling its investigators to anticipate its behaviour, held also in history, at least sufficiently to give the social scientist possibilities of foreseeing, and helping make, the general shape of social things to come. Their grounds for such a belief we shall have to examine later — the incidence of the Soviet Union, though pertinent to the problem, does not yet constitute full *ex post facto* evidence that they were more than mere talented guessers. Here we need merely to state what their attitude

²⁷ (I, 5, 27–8) *The German Ideology*, pp. 28–9.

²⁸ Marx, Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 356.

²⁹ (I, 5, 534) Marx, Third Thesis on Feuerbach, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 472.

was. They held that if historical materialism states correctly the laws of the past, which of course they believed it did — and if whatever uniformity these laws assert holds good for the future as well, which of course they believed it would — then, they concluded, it may be fully expected from the contemporary evidence of the direction of social movement and of human striving, which evidence they explored and exhibited in the most painstaking detail — that the proximate future stage of social relations will be socialist in character. And, for reasons which we will likewise try to probe, they liked what they foresaw. Socialism, in other words, constitutes for them on the one hand a scientific prediction, on the other a value norm. “It will come,” they said as scientists, and as ethicists they nodded approval. We have seen how their idea of change in human nature ties up with their theory of the past. We may now see that it does so just as tightly with what is both their forecast and their hope for future history. Scientifically, socialism necessarily implies, by the nature of the history-and-human-changing dialectic, that men will become different from what they are today. Normatively, socialism has its ultimate value-sanction in that same fact. Socialism would not be good if it did not produce amelioration of the present species.

CHAPTER IV

Human Change in Theory II: Dialectical Materialism

IF HISTORICAL MATERIALISM states the laws of the development of human history, dialectical materialism states the laws of the development of all history whatsoever. It is the Marxian philosophy of change. Does it, then, constitute the Marxian metaphysics?

Unless one is prepared to contend with an eruption from their graves of Marx's and Engels' angry ghosts, it is still perhaps safer to smile when using this word in connection with dialectical materialism. Metaphysics meant to them all manner of intolerable intellectual concessions to irresponsibility and scientific infamy. Philosophers — with certain stated reservations — they were. For want of a better label, their dialectical theory might even be called an ontology. But a metaphysics, never. Except for "bourgeois," which was in many ways synonymous, this was perhaps their own most general term for ideological abuse. Metaphysics meant for them two things of equal iniquity. It meant, on the one hand, sheer irresponsible speculation, immunity to the exigencies of fact, indifference to canons of scientific procedure. On the other it meant, when they used it adjectivally, the very "polar opposite" of dialectical itself — connoting a world view which desiccates and crystallizes everything, renders objects static, atomistic, analytically isolated and severed from one another, ignores the dynamic and interactive "whole" and reifies the lifeless "part."

If the second meaning is a somewhat unconventional and specialized one, peculiar for the most part to Marx and Engels themselves, they saw no reason why this should be so. They claim that most of that actual theorizing of the past which one can call metaphysical in the more usual sense, in the sense of its being speculative and abstract, is at the same time cast within a static, analytic frame of reference, a frame which, as Engels puts it, exhibits "natural objects and natural processes in their isolation, detached from the whole vast interconnection of things; and

therefore not in their motion, but in their repose; not as essentially changing, but as fixed constants; not in their life, but in their death.”⁴⁰ This method, he avows quite willingly, has its uses in the natural sciences; especially in their earlier stages was it quite indispensable for exhibiting, with a clarity requisite to their individual study and examination, the innumerable *details* which compose the dynamic picture of nature and history. But “when, as was the case with Bacon and Locke, this way of looking at things was transferred from natural science to philosophy, it produced the specific narrow-mindedness of the last centuries, the metaphysical mode of thought. . . . To the metaphysician, things and their mental images, ideas, are isolated, to be considered one after the other apart from each other, rigid, fixed objects of investigation given once for all. He thinks in absolutely discontinuous antitheses. His communication is: ‘Yea, yea, nay, nay, for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.’”⁴¹

No, they did not view dialectical materialism as their metaphysics: they thought it neither static and mechanical in outlook, nor speculative, idealistic, and irresponsible to fact in its generalizations and methods of procedure. Its laws they saw, like those of historical materialism, not as idealistic revelations, but as generalized statements of what they believed to be the actual transformations and interconnections which were daily being observed by the natural and social sciences.

But for all the “factual” derivation they insist on for dialectical laws, they made no claim that these laws had sprung fully formed from the observing brain of either Marx or even his fellow scientists. A whole long line of dialectical precursors receive their tribute. In rather broad and nebulous outline, dialectics was actually discovered, Engels claims, by the earliest Greek physicists; but what for them, he qualifies, “was a brilliant intuition, is in our case the result of strictly scientific research in accordance with experience, and hence emerges in a much more definite and clear form.”⁴² Nevertheless he credits Aristotle himself with having analyzed “the most essential forms of dialectical

⁴⁰ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 25) *Anti-Dühring*, p. 27.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 27–8.

⁴² (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 491) *Dialectics of Nature*, pp. 13–14.

thought," and speaks of such later figures as Descartes, Spinoza, Diderot and Rousseau as "brilliant exponents" of it.⁴³ But, with Marx, he believed of course that it was Hegel who first expounded dialectics in a fully conscious way.

Although we have already had occasion to comment on Marx's and Engels' reservations with respect to Hegel's understanding of the dialectic, their distaste for the idealistic and speculative ontology he cast it in, and their own consequent insistence on labeling their own interpretation of it dialectical *materialism*, it will be well for the record to have the matter stated, if only briefly, in their words rather than in ours. "In Hegel's hands," claims Marx, "dialectic underwent a mystification."⁴⁴ "The laws which Hegel 'first developed in all embracing but mystical form,'" Engels explains, "we made it our aim to strip of this mystic form and to bring clearly before the mind in their complete simplicity and universality."⁴⁵ Putting the matter somewhat more pictorially, Marx asserts that "In Hegel's writings dialectic stands on its head."⁴⁶ It "is upside down," Engels elucidates, "because it is supposed to be the 'self-development of thought,' of which the dialectic of facts is therefore only a reflection, whereas really the dialectic in our heads is only the reflection of the actual development which is fulfilled in the world of nature and of human history. . . ."⁴⁷ "You must turn it right way up again," admonishes Marx, "if you want to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell."⁴⁸

Here is no place to explore the ontological details of dialectical "legality."⁴⁹ Marx and Engels themselves grew progressively less concerned both with formal exploitation of dialectical categories *per se*, and with encasing their own thoughts rigidly

⁴³ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 22-3) *Anti-Dühring*, p. 26.

⁴⁴ *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 25.

⁴⁵ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 11) *Anti-Dühring*, p. 16.

⁴⁶ *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 25.

⁴⁷ *Selected Correspondence*, p. 495.

⁴⁸ *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 25.

⁴⁹ In their most common Marxian formulation, the actual laws assert the classical Hegelian 1 - unity of opposites, 2 - quantity to quality transformations, 3 - negation of the negation. Copious elucidations are to be found both in the Marxian originals, and in innumerable commentaries, e.g. (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 123-45) Engels' *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 131-57; Lenin, Notes on Hegel (in *Philosophic Notebooks*); *A Textbook of Marxist Philosophy*, Gollancz, London, 1938.

therein. They end up largely content if "dialectic" shall stress change as such, a plurality of causal factors in the change process, the interactive character of the various lines of causal movement in both natural and social development, and the "emergent" stages and progressive nature of historical transformation in general. Our problem here is merely to come, with them, to some general understanding of dialectical materialism as a theory, of its relation to science, to philosophy, and to the "fact" of human change.

For Marx and Engels, dialectical materialism represented the most detailed account possible of the most general laws that were empirically discoverable in all change known to their historical epoch; it was the form of all process, both human and natural, which had been observed up to that period by the sciences; it described the ontological structure of development. But though its laws are laws of ultimate reality, no transcendental, metaphysical or supra-natural existence attaches to them, for reality is merely nature in development. Nor is there human knowledge of them prior to men's actual experience of natural reality. We know them not by nativistic grace, but after we have seen them operating in the world. They are not, as Engels puts it, "built into nature"; they are "discovered in it and evolved from it."⁵⁰ They are not imposed upon it, not reflected into it like Plato's "presences," not, as Hegel thought, creative of it; they are merely, like any other scientific laws, abstracted from it.⁵¹

Here we see again, in short, the empirical hue of Marx's and Engels' method colouring their ontology itself. Throughout their writings they regard the dialectic in a spirit that suggests the English rather than the Continental attitude of mind. Rejecting the idealistic interpretation the Germans gave it in favour of a naturalistic one, they also reject all a priori, rationalistic, or merely theoretical understanding of its laws, in favour of an a posteriori one, and — no less characteristically British in outlook — an essentially *practical* one. For once "discovered," "abstracted" and "evolved" from the "history of nature and of hu-

⁵⁰ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 12) *Anti-Dühring*, p. 17.

⁵¹ See the quotation from Engels on pages 10-11.

man society," these laws constitute for Marx and Engels neither "dogma," neither set of categorical "principles" from which the various concrete data of the universe can be logically deduced, nor all-embracing "system" within whose framework men are to satisfy themselves in wise reflection on, and contemplative interpretation of, these data. They are, on the one hand, merely "guides to further study and empirical investigation,"⁸² and, on the other, "guides to action," to "practice" (*praxis*), to history-changing deeds.⁸³ Communism, says Engels, "proceeds not from principles, but from facts." It is, he says, "no doctrine, but a movement."⁸⁴

Thus, though the formal outlines of the dialectic had been discovered and articulated by philosophers, its sanction, Marx and Engels thought, is ultimately in no way speculative, and the very philosophers who had unearthed it from the ground of history and nature, had quite failed to sense or understand its actual earthiness. Hence its discoverers could no longer be its custodians, as Engels saw it; its future care, articulation and elaboration must depend on science, not philosophy. Indeed, philosophy itself he saw as of strictly limited usefulness to future knowledge: "As soon as each separate science is required to get clarity as to its position in the great totality of things," he explains, "a special science dealing with this totality is superfluous. What still independently survives of all former philosophy is the science of thought and its laws — formal logic and dialectics. Everything else is merged in the positive science of Nature and history."⁸⁵

Lest such attitudes falsely suggest that he and Marx shared the militant opposition to philosophy of many natural scientists of their time, it should be affirmed that precisely the opposite was the case. If they deplored all tendencies in the natural sciences that they considered metaphysical in the sense of speculative and idealistic, they were often even sharper in their opposition to those which they considered metaphysical in the other

⁸² See pp. 90-1 below.

⁸³ See p. 197 ff below.

⁸⁴ Cited from *The Communists and Karl Heinzen*, in *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. xv.

⁸⁵ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 27-8) *Anti-Dühring*, p. 31.

sense. British empiricist traditions, all the attitudes of mind that Engels included under the term "anti-theoretical naturalism" — the narrow, pretentious, fact-fetishism of the mechanists, their reduction of nature to static and uncoordinated isolates — all this aroused them to the most vigorous invective and to the most spirited assertions that philosophy was the very thing its attackers stood in need of most. "Natural scientists believe that they are freeing themselves from philosophy," Engels says for example, "by ignoring it or abusing it. They cannot, however, make any headway without thought, and for thought they need thought determinations. But they take these categories unreflectingly from the common consciousness of so-called educated persons which is dominated by the relics of long obsolete philosophies, or from the little bit of philosophy compulsorily listened to at the university (which is not only fragmentary, but also a medley of views of people belonging to the most varied and usually the worst schools), or from uncritical and unsystematic reading of philosophical writings of all kinds. Hence they are no less in bondage to philosophy, but unfortunately in most cases to the worst philosophy, and those who abuse philosophy most are slaves to the worst vulgarized relics of the worst philosophers." ⁵⁶ So too with exclusive empiricism: it "imagines," says Engels, "that it operates only with undeniable facts. In reality, however, it operates predominantly with out-of-date notions, with the largely obsolete products of the thought of its predecessors. . . ." ⁵⁷ Hence "the most extreme degree of fantasy, credulity and superstition" is to be found, he thinks, not in the idealistic and speculative trend in natural science, wild as that may be, "but rather in the opposite trend, which, relying on mere experience, treats thought with sovereign disdain and really has gone to the furthest extreme in emptiness of thought." ⁵⁸ No, Engels believes, "dialectics cannot be despised with impunity. However great one's contempt for all theoretical thought, still one cannot bring two natural facts into relation with one

⁵⁶ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 624) *Dialectics of Nature*, pp. 183-4.

⁵⁷ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 567) *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁵⁸ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 707) *Ibid.*, p. 297.

another, or understand the connection existing between them, without theoretical thought. The only question is whether one's thinking is correct or not, and contempt of theory is clearly the most certain way to think naturalistically, and therefore incorrectly."⁵⁹

We have referred to the unfinished manuscript of Engels that has recently been published as *Dialectics of Nature*. When Engels began this project, his stated purpose was to exhibit, on the basis of a compendious survey of the history and latest developments of the natural sciences, as much of the detail of dialectical ontology as the stage of scientific discovery appeared to him to permit. When, later, he is forced to give up, or at least to postpone this undertaking by the pressure of practical affairs, he feels able to comfort himself for the many years already put into it by some observations, half-prophetic in spirit, which, in the interests of a somewhat broader historical perspective of the dialectic, it will be well for us to glance at and to consider in relation to subsequent actual developments. "It may be," he says, "that the theoretical advance of natural science will make my work to a great extent or even altogether superfluous. For the revolution which is being forced on theoretical natural science by the mere need to set in order the purely empirical discoveries, great masses of which are now being piled up, is of such a kind that it must bring the dialectical character of natural events more and more to the consciousness even of those empiricists who are most opposed to it. The old rigid antitheses, the sharp, impassable dividing lines are more and more disappearing. Since even the last 'pure' gases have been liquefied, and since it has been proved that a body can be brought into a condition in which the liquid and the gaseous forms cannot be distinguished from each other, the physical states have lost the last relics of their former absolute character. . . . Although ten years ago the great basic law of all motion, then recently discovered, was as yet conceived

⁵⁹ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 715) *Ibid.*, p. 309. By "naturalistically" Engels here again means "statically," "mechanically," "empirically" in the narrowest sense, or, "metaphysically" as they employed this word in its second meaning. Today, of course, naturalism means something quite different. Marxism itself is an outstanding example of a naturalistic philosophy excluding, as it does, anything of a super-natural, transcendental or spiritualistic sort.

merely as the law of the *conservation* of energy, as the mere expression of the indestructibility and uncreatability of motion, that is, merely in its quantitative aspect, this narrow, negative conception is being more and more supplanted by the positive idea of the *transformation* of energy, in which, for the first time the qualitative content of the process comes into its own. . . . And since biology has been pursued in the light of the theory of evolution, in the domain of organic nature one fixed boundary line of classification after another has been swept away. The most unclassifiable intermediate links are growing daily more numerous; closer investigation throws organisms out of one class into another, and distinguishing characteristics which had become almost articles of faith are losing their absolute validity. . . . It is however precisely the polar antagonisms put forward as irreconcilable and insoluble, the forcible fixed lines of demarcation and distinctions between classes, which have given modern theoretical natural science its restricted and metaphysical character. The recognition that these antagonisms and distinctions are in fact to be found in nature, but only with relative validity, and that on the other hand their imagined rigidity and absoluteness have been introduced into nature only by our minds — this recognition is the kernel of the dialectical conception of nature. It is possible to reach this standpoint because the accumulating facts of natural science compel us to do so; but we reach it more easily if we approach the dialectical character of these facts equipped with the consciousness of the laws of dialectical thought. In any case natural science has now advanced so far that it can no longer escape the dialectical synthesis. But it will make this process easier for itself if it does not lose sight of the fact that the results in which its experiences are summarized are concepts; but that the art of working with concepts is neither inborn nor given with ordinary everyday consciousness, but requires real thought, and that this thought similarly has a long empirical history not more and not less than empirical natural science. Only by learning to assimilate the results of the development of philosophy during the past two and a half thousand years, will it be able to rid itself on the one hand of any isolated

natural philosophy standing apart from it, outside it and above it, and on the other hand of its own limited method of thought, which was its inheritance from English empiricism." ⁸⁰

To what extent if at all have these various expectations of Engels been subsequently fulfilled? It may be said at the outset, of course, that in one sixth of the world, the "socialist sixth," they are entirely fulfilled — Soviet scientific theory takes its departure from the dialectical principles which Marx and Engels enunciated. In the non-socialist world, the situation is in no way uniform. On the one hand there is a small, but perhaps increasing, number of individual scientists of outstanding position in their various fields ⁸¹ who claim to have come, by one path or another, to pretty much exactly the Marxian conclusions. Much larger, very extensive in fact, is the number who, without benefit of the light of Marxism, have arrived at a general outlook quite similar in most essentials, to the one described by Engels. Change, today, is rather generally accepted in most of the sciences: process and event have become more fundamental categories than are those of "thing" or "substance." "The old rigid antitheses, the sharp, impassable dividing lines" which, Engels says, "are more and more disappearing," have largely disappeared. There are not many mechanical materialists left, on the whole, amongst natural or social scientific theorists, and causal monism has, for the most part, gone the way of the "metaphysical mode of thought" in general. Where the causal concept survives — and it still breathes lustily among scientists for all the onslaughts of radical empiricist and positivist philosophy — it is disposed toward pluralism and more and more generally cast into the reference frame of the "field," the "context," the "*Gestalt*," the "configuration." "Impact" has largely given way to "interaction," and while it is probable that "progress" has suffered a genuine setback in both natural and social science, "genesis," "history," "development," and — to perhaps a lesser extent and often with strictly idealist orientations which Engels would deplore — "emergence," have come pretty much into

⁸⁰ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 12-14) *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 17-19.

⁸¹ E.g., J. B. S. Haldane, Paul Langevin, Maurice Dobb, Marcel Prenant, J. D. Bernal, Hyman Levy, et al.

their own. On the whole Engels could certainly not feel that his expectations had been utterly demolished by the test of time.

On the other hand, he could by no means yet feel completely vindicated. The tradition of "British empiricism" has proved far more tenacious than he supposed it could be, and it constitutes — with whatever still survives of what he called "anti-theoretical naturalism," a large and important bloc in the world of capitalist science. If it is forced to make frequent concessions to the sensationalism, subjectivism, idealism, or sheer formalism of its philosophical allies — not to mention the occasional racism or nationalism of its political wardens — this is something that Engels might be quick to point out and gloat over, but it would not change the fact. Here, certainly, his hopes have fallen short of fulfillment. Whether he would be willing to attribute this to weakness in the evidence, to gaps that may be still remaining in the accumulating facts, it is impossible to know. But probably he would not. Probably he would turn, with Marx, to an ideological explanation. In its mystified form (*i.e.*, idealistic speculative), Marx points out, the dialectic became quite fashionable in Hegel's day, but "in its rational form [*i.e.*, scientific materialistic] it is a scandal and an abomination to the bourgeoisie and its doctrinaire professors, because, while furnishing a positive understanding of the existing state of things, it at the same time furnishes an understanding of the negation of that state of things, and enables us to recognize that that state of things will inevitably break up; it is an abomination to them because it regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, as transient; because . . . it is in its very nature critical and revolutionary."⁶²

We have seen in previous chapters how historical, biological and sociological evidence indicated to Marx and Engels that man changes; how human mutability was implied in their theory of historical materialism and was a sanction of the socialist objective. Now we see it finally in its ontological reference: ". . . the whole of nature, from the smallest element to the greatest, from grains of sand to suns, from protozoa to men, has

⁶² *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 25-6.

its existence in eternal coming into being and passing away, in ceaseless flux, in unresting motion and change. . . ." ⁶⁸ In short, man changes by the very nature of the universe of which he is a part.

Be it reasserted however in conclusion, so that there may be no subsequent misapprehension of the matter, that although this universe of Marx and Engels is dialectical throughout, the determinants of man's change, the causes of his dialectically structured mutations are not Ideas. They are not Ideas in their abstract self-development, as with the speculative dialectician Hegel. They are not Ideas in their immanent purposiveness, as with the teleological dialectician Aristotle. Nor, finally, are they the Ideas of the ancient cosmological dialecticians of Hellas, though the similarity here is avowedly closer. But if Marx and Engels "have once again returned to the point of view of the great founders of Greek philosophy," as Engels believes, they have not assigned a causative role to ontological or cosmological generalizations. No *logos*, as with the philosopher of Ephesus, no cosmological "union of opposites," no Heraclitean "Strife as the father of all and the king of all" determines the transformation of men. The determinants of man's change, as Marx and Engels see it, are man's own concrete productive practices in the business of maintaining the concrete material conditions necessary to the actual continuance of life. And since it is these conditions which in turn determine all of life's ideological refinements, including dialectics, rather than vice versa, we must, if we are to understand Marx and Engels, regard the interactive relations of production between man and his environment which we are now ready to examine, as instances of, and in no sense as deductions from, the dialectical movement of material processes in general.

⁶⁸ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 491) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 13.

PART TWO

MAN IN PARTICULAR: HOW HUMAN NATURE CHANGES

But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the *ensemble* of the social relations.

Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach

CHAPTER V

Labour

"LABOUR," says Engels, ". . . is the primary basic condition for all human existence, and this to such an extent that, in a sense, we have to say that labour created man himself."⁶⁴ This is not of course to say, scripturally, that in the beginning God said "Let there be labour!", whereupon man was created to perform it. Nor is it to be attributed to any class-fetishistic exaltation of the characteristic function of the working man into a biological first principle. For Marx and Engels it was no sort of assumption whatsoever, either religious, psychological or metaphysical. It was as they saw it a fact, or, more properly speaking, a direct inference from a fact. As "creator of use value," says Marx, "as useful labour, labour is a necessary condition for the existence of the human race, and one that is independent of all forms of society; it is an eternal necessity imposed by nature itself, without which there can be no material exchanges between man and nature, and therefore no life."⁶⁵ In short, to be men, men must live, and to live, even in an economy of banana and bread-fruit abundance, they must produce their living, that is, their food, clothing and shelter, by the manipulation of nature. This manipulation of nature, which transforms nature's face, and at the same time transforms the transformer, is labour. A miner, gutting and honeycombing a mountain, in this enterprise develops specialized muscles, and perhaps pathological lung conditions and peculiarities of vision; a scholar or engineer, manipulating nature at one remove, achieves certain intellectual dexterities and perhaps certain sedentary callouses and digestive inadequacies. Labour is primarily "a process going on between man and nature, a process in which man, through his own activity, initiates, regulates, and controls the material reactions between himself and nature. He confronts nature as one of her

⁶⁴ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 695) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 279.

⁶⁵ *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 50. When Marx speaks of labour as being "independent of the forms of society," he means, of course, merely a "universal condition" of them. See *Ibid.*, p. 205.

own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate nature's productions in a form adapted to his own wants. By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature. He develops the powers that slumber within him, and subjects them to his own control."⁶⁶

Labour, then, is the primary factor in the modification of man, according to Marx and Engels. But labour does not take place in a biological or social vacuum. Labour is performed by organic beings, and these organic beings have relations with one another that refer directly to their livelihood. In other words, labour does not create men out of nothing or in isolation. It transforms what was not man into what is man; moreover once this crucial transformation has occurred, it may be flatly said that labour is social in character.

It should be clear, then, that when Marx and Engels speak of labour, or the labour process, or production, they are usually not concerned with those primitive and instinctive forms of labour which humans share with other animals.⁶⁷ They refer primarily to the conscious, purposive and planned activity which is carried on for the fitting of natural substances to human wants, which effects an exchange of matter between man and nature.⁶⁸

Now, in addition to being planned and purposive, traits which distinguish "production" from the instinctive work of animals, human labour is always social. "All production," says Marx, "is appropriation of nature by the individual *within and through a definite form of society*."⁶⁹ Human labour is social because man is social. "Man is in the most literal sense of the word," says Marx, "a *zoon politikon*, not only a social animal, but an animal which can develop into an individual only in society. Production by isolated individuals outside of society—something which might happen as an exception to a civilized man who by accident got into the wilderness and already dynamically possessed within

⁶⁶ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 197–8.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 205. For detailed examination of this point, see below, p. 66 ff.

⁶⁹ *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, The International Library Publishing Co., N. Y., 1904, p. 273. Emphasis mine.

himself the forces of society — is as great an absurdity as the idea of the development of language without individuals living together and talking to one another. . . . Whenever we speak, therefore, of production, we always have in mind production at a certain stage of social development, or production by social individuals.”⁷⁰

Here Marx breaks explicitly, as Marxism does implicitly by its entire burden and content, with the isolated individual of the contract theorists and the British economists. “The individual and isolated hunter or fisher who forms the starting point with Smith and Ricardo,” he says, “belongs to the insipid illusions of the eighteenth century. They are Robinsonades . . . [like] Rousseau’s ‘*contrat social*,’ which makes naturally independent individuals come in contact and have mutual intercourse by contract.”⁷¹ Marx’s evidence? Actual history both biological and social, so far as it was known, as well as the patency of the rationalization. “. . . our simian ancestors,” Engels points out, “were gregarious; it is obviously impossible to seek the derivation of man, the most social of all animals, from non-gregarious immediate ancestors.”⁷² And for Marx the rationalization was too perfect: to the prophets of the bourgeois eighteenth century the competitive individual, free from the bonds of nature, appeared as an ideal; what more natural, observes Marx, than that they should regard this ideal figure, the apotheosis of their epoch, as an actually existing creature of the past, the original prototype of man, a product not of history but of nature itself?⁷³

This does not prove the point, of course. No one can yet know for certain just what the prehistorical state of man was in respect to society, and, in the simian world, there do appear to exist “solitary” gorillas. But present day biological evidence tends on the whole to confirm Engels, pointing to the generally gregarious character of mammals, and what is known of the history of men points to the societal character of the groups of human mammalia. “The further we go back into history,” Marx

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 265–6.

⁷² (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 695) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 282.

⁷³ *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 267.

said, with less evidence than we now possess, "the more the individual, and, therefore, the producing individual seems to depend on and constitute a part of a larger whole: at first it is, quite naturally, the family and the clan, which is but an enlarged family; later on, it is the community growing up in its different forms out of the clash and amalgamation of clans. It is but in the eighteenth century, in 'bourgeois society,' that the different forms of social union *confront the individual as a mere means to his private ends*,"⁷⁴ and lead him, presumably, — though paradoxically enough, since in fact the actual interrelations of society have here reached the highest state of historical development⁷⁵ — to create in the face of history and the teeth of biology, the "eternal" nature of man out of the image of his own highly temporal needs.

No, man for Marx and Engels is not what any epoch may desire to perpetuate either in monument or vindication. He is what the historical facts reveal and what may be, reasonably inferred from them, with all due allowance made for the coloration these facts may absorb from the differing desires, Marxian or otherwise, of different men or epochs. He is the best human thought can arrive at, given the historical relativity of knowledge, by way of adhering to and "never abandoning for a moment" real, concrete men, "not in any fantastic isolation or definition, but in their actual empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions."

Man, then, for Marx and Engels, is a social animal. And man's social labour, in the production of his means of livelihood, is the chief instrument in the transformation and development of his "nature." But the very fact that labour is social and that society in the Marxian view has always been, except in its most primitive stages, a society divided into economic classes, raises a problem. In earlier periods of human association there were, according to Marx and Engels, no classes. Under these circumstances all modes of production aimed, Engels says, "merely at achieving the most immediately and directly useful effect of la-

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* My emphasis.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

bour," ⁷⁶ that is to say the most direct appropriation of nature's goods to human needs. Here, then, labour for need appears to have been the basic factor in human change. But with the emergence of differences in distribution, class differences emerge in this primitive society. "Society divides itself into classes, the privileged and the dispossessed, the exploiters and the exploited; the rulers and the ruled." ⁷⁷ Thereafter, not human needs directly and in general, but the "interests of the ruling class became the driving factor of production." ⁷⁸ This ultimately, in the Marxian view, transfers responsibility for most of the actual historical changes in human "nature" from the mere labour of production to the class interests which determine what kind of production shall be carried on at any given time. Man, we have been told, is distinguished from other parts of nature and determined in his development by the character of his productive labour. But the character of his productive labour, far from being determined by his choice, preference or need, is determined on the one hand by the character of the productive enterprises which his society may happen to offer (e.g., he cannot today choose, and hope to live by, the craft of battle-axe making), and, on the other, by the jobs that happen to be open in any of the available productive enterprises (many skilled mechanics are ditch diggers, many lawyers are soda clerks). And the availability of both enterprises and jobs is determined by the interests (under capitalism, in terms of profits) of those who happen to be in ownership control of the means of production. Hence it is the class structure of society which, except in the case of the most primitive communities, historically determines the kind of men there will be at any given time and the direction of the development of human nature.

Thus, while man, in the Marxian view, is generically a social animal, he is specifically — and speaking metaphorically, of course — a "class animal." If society imposes on him the general differentiating configuration which corresponds to its produc-

⁷⁶ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 704) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 294.

⁷⁷ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 152-3) *Anti-Dühring*, p. 165.

⁷⁸ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 705) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 295.

tive habits, the classes within society determine him,⁷⁹ primarily through the division of labour as we shall see below,⁸⁰ to be one specific kind of man within that configuration rather than another. What was for the artisan a "life-long specialty of handling one and the same tool," says Marx, becomes, in the industrial era, "the life-long specialty of serving one and the same machine."⁸¹ Since in this life-long specialty "it is only the most simple, most monotonous and most easily acquired knack that is required of him,"⁸² the worker himself becomes an automaton. He "is made the automatic motor of a fractional operation."⁸³ He is transformed, "from his very childhood, into a part of a detail-machine,"⁸⁴ — automatic in physical movement, mechanical and routine in life habits, limited and dull in thought. Likewise, the members of privileged classes are transformed and moulded by the specialties with which their class furnishes them; the capitalist by his money and his thirst for profits; the lawyer by "his fossilized legal conceptions, which dominate him as a power independent of him; the 'educated classes' in general . . . [by] their own physical and mental shortsightedness . . . their stunted, specialized education and the fact that they are chained for life to this specialized activity itself — even when this specialized activity is merely to do nothing."⁸⁵

These illustrations, of course, give only one side of the picture, the side that seemed to Marx and Engels to be dangerously in the ascendancy during the period of capitalist decline. But they are hardly what Marx was thinking of when he wrote of "the powers that slumber within man," the inner forces which by productive labour, he subjects to his own control.⁸⁶ No, here he evidently meant the positive and expansive achievements of which man was capable in the manipulation of both nature and human nature. Marx's phrasing is undoubtedly metaphorical.

⁷⁹ Except, of course, in the "classless" primitive societies which we shall later consider.

⁸⁰ Pp. 122-47.

⁸¹ Cited, from *Capital*, by Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 318.

⁸² (I, 6, 532) *The Communist Manifesto*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 212.

⁸³ From *Capital*, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 318.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 204) Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 319.

⁸⁶ See above, p. 50.

He is not thinking, in Aristotelian fashion, of latent potentialities waiting to be unfolded in a fixed pattern. He is probably regarding empirically the progressive achievements of the past, the great works of art, the triumphs of knowledge and science, the miracles of technology which have historically been developed by man in his productive relations with nature. These too, according to historical materialism, have been ultimately consequences of the labour process, no less than the stultifications which seemed to threaten Marx's particular generation, and he wanted to see human nature continue, and believed it would continue, in the progressive rather than the retrogressive direction. This, however, introduces an evaluation into what we are trying first to consider in its more narrowly descriptive aspects. The point here is simply that man changes, both from epoch to epoch and within the confines of an individual life, that the chief and basic agent of his change, whether it be in organic constitution or in intellectual and moral outlook, is his labour, or the way he makes his living, and that this, in present circumstances, is class-determined.

This is the nub of the causal question in the Marxian theory of anthropology. It raises a problem which should be considered at some length before we undertake an examination of the details, grounds, and consequences of the theory. Not only does labour change man, not only is it a necessary condition of human existence, but — Engels goes so far as to assert — in a sense, labour created man himself. Now, nothing for Engels was un-historical. There was never and nowhere creation *ex nihilo*. Labour has always been performed by organic beings, and in this performance it transformed what was not man into what is man. For a complete knowledge of the Marxian anthropology, then, we must learn what Marx and Engels considered to be the origin and nature of organic beings in general, and then, specifically, how the human species is differentiated.

CHAPTER VI

Man as an Organism

THE BIOLOGY OF dialectical materialism, like its physics, was developed in fuller detail by Engels than by Marx. For both, as we have seen, it was dominated by historical and evolutionary concepts — a consequence, partly of their general anti-metaphysical point of view and predilection for change, and partly of their concern to keep abreast of the newest factual evidence and the latest theories of the natural sciences. The anti-Newtonian conception of the historical and developmental character of the stellar and planetary systems impressed them deeply, “. . . it contained,” says Engels, “the point of departure for all further progress. If the earth were something that had come into being, then its present geological, geographical and climatic state, and its plants and animals likewise, must be something that had come into being. . . .”⁸⁷ Thus in a sense it was this historical conception of inorganic nature that forced the development, in the biological realm, of those evolutionary researches and concepts which came to a head in Darwinism and which Marx and Engels followed with eager interest.

Their view of the historical relations between the inorganic and the organic realms corresponds rather closely to that generally held today. The cosmos for them was not a fixed order of eternal and changeless bodies whose motion was merely “the incessant repetition of the same process . . .”⁸⁸ a conception for which they particularly reproached Newton, but something which had an origin in time, a historical development, and a future of perhaps slow but nonetheless inevitable change. Similarly, the phenomena of life had an origin in time, appearing on the earth when the temperature and atmosphere had become suitable, developing through long ages the various differentiations which characterize the species we find today as well as those extinct forms whose records have been left in skeletons and fossils.

⁸⁷ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 487) *Dialectics of Nature*, pp. 8–9.

⁸⁸ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 61) Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 65.

This evolutionary view is probably the chief theoretical source of their materialism. Any form of subjectivism or idealism which derived the cosmos from any act or content of thought or experience, appeared to them not only reactionary and "metaphysical," but also simply absurd in the face of the weight of scientific evidence that human beings (and hence thought, ideas and experience) emerged at a very late stage in cosmic history.

As to the details of cosmic and biological development, they accepted for the most part, but with varying degrees of critical reservation, the widely credited nebular hypothesis of Laplace on the one hand, and, on the other, the then new Darwinian theory. It has subsequently been shown, of course, that the smallest of the spiral nebulae is far too vast to have produced a planetary system like ours and the nebular theory of solar origins has thus been proved inadequate. But the hundred years of its reign furnished Engels good company in his enthusiasm for it. And it is truly doubtful, from Engels' writings, whether its disproof would have disturbed him greatly. He is far less interested in its descriptive details than in its general cosmological import and influence on the other sciences.⁸⁹

Let us now turn to the problem of what it is that performs the labour that first creates, and then changes, men. At one point in the course of cosmic history, according to Marx and Engels, life is chemically generated out of the inorganic. At what point this occurs we do not know, but we may say with certainty, as Engels puts it, that life must have arisen as a result of chemical action: ". . . chemistry leads to organic life, and it has gone far enough

⁸⁹ This is attested by the fact, amongst others, that it is Kant, whose formulation of the theory, though admittedly highly speculative and imaginative, was earlier by half a century than Laplace's, who receives from him the more enthusiastic treatment. The most he says for Laplace is that he has shown in detail how a solar system develops from a nebular mass "in a manner still unsurpassed; subsequent science has more and more confirmed him" (*Dialectics of Nature*, p. 15). Whereas, in speaking of the original formulation of the theory in 1755, he says "The Kantian theory of the origin of all existing celestial bodies from rotating nebular masses was the greatest advance made by astronomy since Copernicus. For the first time the conception that nature had no history in time began to be shaken" (*Anti-Dühring*, p. 65). This statement is somewhat hyperbolic, but its burden and general emphasis are both clear and probably correct. Astronomy, in discarding the nebular hypothesis, has not given up the recognition of cosmic history which it involves and in which Engels was primarily interested.

to assure us that *it alone* will explain to us the dialectical transition to the organism."⁹⁰ And the only reasonable supposition that can be entertained is that this transition was originally from inorganic matter.⁹¹ On these two points Marx and Engels, in spite of their support of the biogenists against the theories of spontaneous generation current at the time, take their stand unequivocally against all doctrines of divine creation of the first organisms on the one hand, and the pan-vitalistic alternative that was proposed by even such people as Liebig and Helmholtz on the other.

The two hundred year old argument between the supporters and the opponents of the belief in the spontaneous generation of organisms out of putrescent organic matter,⁹² still had vigour enough in the middle of the nineteenth century to split biologists into two active camps and to elicit some of the best experimental work of Pasteur. Engels comes out flatly against the spontaneous generation of living organisms out of the decomposition of others. It "belongs essentially," he says, "to the epoch of immutable species."⁹³ ". . . it has become foolish to desire to explain the origin of even a single cell directly from dead matter instead of from structureless living protein, to believe that it is possible by means of a little stinking water to force nature to accomplish in twenty-four hours what it has cost her thousands of years to bring about."⁹⁴ While Engels here repudiates abiogenesis in favour of the theory that all living things are the product of living things, he at the same time affirms at the end of the sentence his conviction that nature's original production of life was from inorganic matter. There is no necessary inconsistency here. The theory of biogenesis refers only to known existing organisms, not to any which may have appeared at the earliest stages of organic evolution when conditions were quite different. Engels is here taking what is today a widely accepted position, sup-

⁹⁰ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 604) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 157; cf. (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 76) *Anti-Dühring*, p. 82; Ludwig Feuerbach, *Op. Cit.*, p. 455.

⁹¹ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 631-3) *Dialectics of Nature*, pp. 193-6.

⁹² Begun in the middle of the 17th century by Redi's experiments in disproof of the Aristotelian view and continued in the middle of the 18th by Needham and Spallanzani.

⁹³ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 627) *Dialectics of Nature*, pp. 187-8.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 188-9.

ported in his own day by, among others for example, T. H. Huxley.

Life comes originally, then, by ordinary chemical action which at some future time may well be repeatable in the laboratory, from inorganic matter. Engels repeatedly refers to the possibility of the artificial reproduction of this chemical action⁹⁵ and has little patience with those who despair of it on the basis of present failures. "What Helmholtz says of the sterility of attempts to produce life artificially," he insists, "is pure childishness. . . . So long . . . as we know no more of the chemical composition of protein than we do at present, and therefore for probably another hundred years to come cannot think of its artificial preparation, it is ridiculous to complain that all our efforts, etc., have failed!"⁹⁶

If one generalized from such failures it is obvious enough that one is apt to end either in the sort of divine creation theory that even Darwin seems to have accepted in the last paragraph of *The Origin of Species*, or else in pan-vitalism, as did Helmholtz and even the famous bio-chemist Liebig. Both of these alternatives were naturally repugnant to Engels, if only because, like "caloric" and "phlogiston," they closed the door to scientific investigation in the field. Divine creation he dismisses with few words, his position on this in general not being very apt to leave any uncertainties. As to the theory that life was coeternal with matter, that its "germs" as Helmholtz called them, were scattered about here and there in the universe, settling and taking root from time to time on whichever of the heavenly bodies happened to offer conditions that were propitious, he has more specific things to say. Theoretically, he maintains, the pan-vitalistic hypothesis rests on two presuppositions: the eternal existence of protein, and the eternal existence of the original forms from which everything organic can develop — both of which he deemed inadmissible on various grounds of which many seem to hold today.⁹⁷ Practically, life, he points out, at least as it was

⁹⁵ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 633, 664, 76, 86) *Ibid.*, pp. 196, 239, 324; (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 76, 86) *Anti-Duhring*, pp. 82, 92; *et al.*

⁹⁶ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 632) *Dialectics of Nature*, pp. 195-6.

⁹⁷ For his analysis, see (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 628-33) *Ibid.*, pp. 190-7.

known then, cannot exist either on glowing hot bodies, such as all the heavenly bodies and their atmospheres, not to speak of the nebulae, supposedly originally were, nor in interstellar space, where not only is the temperature close to absolute zero, but where there is neither air nor nourishment.⁹⁸

Life, then, according to Engels, is a product of cosmic history. We do not yet know the details of its origin, nor can we yet produce it artificially, but we have been able to make certain observations about its characteristics and about how it differs from inorganic nature. "Life is the mode of existence of protein substances," says Engels. "Everywhere where we find life we find it associated with a protein body, and everywhere where we find a protein body not in the process of dissolution, there also without exception we find the phenomena of life."⁹⁹ And what is it that is characteristic of protein bodies that is not to be observed in substances that are not protein? Metabolism, says Engels, the "*continual metabolic interchange with the natural environment outside them . . .*,"¹⁰⁰ the absorption and assimilation of appropriate substances from the environment and the sloughing off and excretion of their older parts.¹⁰¹ Here is to be observed the dialectical and mutually transfiguring interaction between organism and environment that appears later between man and nature in the labour process. Can it be said, however, that this alone distinguishes life clearly from the inorganic? Do we not find a similar, mutually transfiguring exchange of matter amongst inorganic substances? To be sure, says Engels, "in the long run it occurs everywhere, since chemical reactions take place, even if extremely slowly, everywhere."¹⁰² Iron rusts, and rocks erode. But in these cases the iron and the rock cease to be what they were; they are destroyed by this metabolic interaction, whereas living bodies are destroyed without it. "What with

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁹⁹ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 85) *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 91-2; cf. (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 632-3) *Dialectics of Nature*, pp. 195-6. Following the translators of *Dialectics of Nature*, and for the reasons which they give on page 16, Note 1, I shall continue to render Engels' word *Eiweiss* as "protein" instead of "albumen."

¹⁰⁰ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 632) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 196.

¹⁰¹ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 85) *Anti-Dühring*, p. 92.

¹⁰² (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 632 n) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 196 n.

non-living bodies is the cause of destruction," Engels remarks, "with protein is *the fundamental condition of existence*. From the moment when this uninterrupted metamorphosis of its constituents, this constant alternation of nutrition and excretion, no longer takes place in a protein body from that moment the protein body itself comes to an end and decomposes, that is, it *dies*." ¹⁰⁸

By Engels' own admission this definition of life is inadequate because of its too great simplicity. Here again he reveals the nominalistic and empiricistic tendencies we remarked earlier. "From a scientific standpoint," he says, "all definitions are of little value. In order to gain a really exhaustive knowledge of what life is, we should have to go through all the forms in which it appears, from the lowest up to the highest." To call it the mode of existence of protein bodies, characterized by metabolism, limits the matter to life phenomena which are the most common and the simplest, which is only useful for ordinary purposes and in the absence of more detailed knowledge. ¹⁰⁴

Once having originated, life evolved, from the simplest forms of protein or albumen, to the most primitive unicellular organisms, then to protozoa, from which developed, by differentiation, the various plant and animal species. ¹⁰⁵ Here Marx and Engels side with Darwin against the upholders of polygenesis, that is, the theory that the various species of plants and animals have descended from numerous primordial ancestors rather than from one or a very few. Here again present day paleontological evidence seems to confirm them in the case both of pre-

¹⁰⁸ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 85-6) *Anti-Dühring*, p. 92. Even the so-called "artificial cells" of Traube are no refutation of this definition of vital process, for the exchange of matter that takes place here consists merely, as Engels points out, in the "unaltered absorption of a liquid by endosmosis, while metabolism consists in the absorption of substances, the chemical composition of which is altered, which are assimilated by the organism, and the residua of which are excreted together with the decomposition products of the organism itself resulting from the life process." *Dialectics of Nature*. p. 197.

¹⁰⁴ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 85-6) *Anti-Dühring*, p. 93.

¹⁰⁵ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Op. Cit.*, p. 455; (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 76) *Anti-Dühring*, p. 81; (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 493, 621-2, 627) *Dialectics of Nature*, pp. 17, 179-81, 188, 350, 353-4.

human organisms and of man, though there remain difficulties and polygenesis is not without its occasional defenders.¹⁰⁶

With respect to the precise details of the causal mechanisms of the evolutionary process, Marx and Engels — except on the matter of the transition from ape to man as we shall see — have little to say. Although they accepted the general burden of the Darwinian hypothesis and defended it vigorously, they consider it neither complete nor definitive. Engels points out — something that Darwin himself avowed¹⁰⁷ — that natural selection deals only with the manner of preservation of individual variations and their generalization into species, not with their causes — “which up to the present remain entirely unknown.”¹⁰⁸ Darwin, he says, merely gave “impetus” to the scientific investigation of this problem. But even in its proper domain, Marx and Engels felt, Darwin’s concept of natural selection must be used judiciously and only with patient and careful concrete study. Otherwise it can easily become merely verbal and an excuse for “intellectual laziness” and “sham-scientific ignorance.” So, as Marx puts it, “instead of analyzing the struggle for life as represented historically in different definite forms of society, all that has to be done is to translate every concrete struggle into the phrase ‘struggle for life’ and this into the Malthusian population fantasy.”¹⁰⁹

Comments of this sort show that Marx accepted as a fact that an actual struggle for life exists in the biological world. In *Capital*, this passage appears:

The social division of labour confronts, one with another, independent producers of commodities who recognize no other authority than that of competition, the coercion exercised upon them by the pressure

¹⁰⁶ The difficulties are theoretical, however, and not based on matters of evidence. In general, for example, it is obviously hard to derive the enormous variety of species, historical and contemporary, from an original uniformity. In particular reference to man, problems are presented by the duality (at least) of basic blood varieties in view of the Mendelian transmission of its composition. It has even been urged that the multiplicity of languages argues for polygenesis. Whatever dispute there still remains is thus largely speculative.

¹⁰⁷ *On the Origin of Species*, World Library, Harper & Brothers, no date; pp. 106, 109.

¹⁰⁸ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 74) *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 79–80.

¹⁰⁹ Marx to Kugelmann, June 27, 1870; *Selected Correspondence*, p. 201.

of their reciprocal interests — *just as in the animal kingdom the war of all against all maintains, more or less, the condition of existence of all species.*¹¹⁰

If we connect such statements with the one to Lasalle quoted above (p. 15) to the effect that Darwin's book serves as a basis in natural science for the class struggle in history, it seems easy to conclude that this phase of Darwinism was the one which elicited Marx's greatest enthusiasm. In truth, however, just the opposite is the case: the struggle for existence in its generalized Darwinian form is the chief target of criticism for both Marx and Engels; their admiration was for the materialistic, anti-teleological point of departure of Darwinism. Darwin himself spoke of the struggle for life as the doctrine of Malthus applied with manifold force to the whole animal and vegetable kingdoms, and this is enough to make Marx and Engels suspicious. For their respect for the doctrine of Malthus, which Marx called a "libel on the human race," was as scant as it was for the parson's person.¹¹¹ Marx's chief scientific objection to Malthusianism seems to have been its anti-historical, abstract character: it simply did not meet the facts. "In fact," says Marx, "every method of production that arises in the course of history has its own peculiar, historically valid, law of population. It is only for plants and animals that there is a law of population in the abstract; and that only in so far as man does not interfere with them."¹¹²

But in any case, Marx felt, the Darwinian application of Malthusianism shows a naive incomprehension of the actual inner meaning of the doctrine, quite apart from the question of its validity: ". . . the whole point of Mr. Malthus lies in the fact that he does *not* apply his theory to plants and animals, but *only* to men — in geometrical progression — as opposed to plants and animals."¹¹³ That is to say, it is the merely arithmetical multiplication of man's plant and animal sustenance that makes a problem out of the geometrical rate of human increase.

¹¹⁰ Vol. I, p. 391. My emphasis.

¹¹¹ See, for example, *Selected Correspondence*, pp. 170, 198-9, 201; *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 580 n, 675 n, 695-6, *et al.*

¹¹² *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 692-3. Cf. (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 72, 73) Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 78.

¹¹³ (III, 3, 77). Letter of June 18, 1862. •

On the whole it may be said that, in its generalized Darwinian form, the struggle for existence was too patent a gem of bourgeois ideology to pass Marxian muster fully as a scientific concept: it is "simply the transference from society to organic nature," says Engels, "of Hobbes' theory of *bellum omnium contra omnes*, and of the bourgeois theory of economic competition, as well as the Malthusian theory of population."¹¹⁴ And Marx, gleefully: "it is splendid that Darwin again discovers among plants and animals his English society with its division of labour, competition, opening up of new markets, 'inventions' and Malthusian struggle for existence."¹¹⁵ And finally, Engels again, in rather sober irony: "Darwin did not know what a bitter satire he wrote on mankind, and especially on his countrymen, when he showed that free competition, the struggle for existence, which the economists celebrate as the highest historical achievement, is the normal state of the *animal kingdom*."¹¹⁶ In short, far from supporting Marxism, this theory merely serves, if transferred back from natural history into the society from which it was originally borrowed, to eternalize and justify as though grounded in nature itself, the barbarous economic relations of the particular historical epoch of bourgeois capitalism.¹¹⁷

These were the chief political and ideological objections to the hypothesis of natural selection. Within a more restricted scientific sphere than that in which Darwin employed it, it obviously served a sound explanatory purpose, and it was only natural, says Engels, that Darwin, like all innovators, should have attributed to his discovery too wide a field of action,¹¹⁸ so that the struggle for life tended to obscure the equally important fact of co-operation in the biological world.¹¹⁹ But scientifically, Dar-

¹¹⁴ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 641) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 208.

¹¹⁵ (III, 3, 77-8) *Letter cit.*, June 18, 1862.

¹¹⁶ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 495) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 19.

¹¹⁷ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 241) *Ibid.*, p. 209. Engels rejects such a transference not only on ideological but on scientific grounds: "The most that the animal can achieve is to collect: man produces, he prepares the means of life in the widest sense of the words, which, without him, nature would not have produced. This makes impossible the immediate transference of the laws of life in animal societies to human ones." (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 242) *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 74) *Anti-Dühring*, p. 79.

¹¹⁹ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 241) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 208.

win's chief mistakes were, on the one hand, his naive and unreflecting acceptance of the theory of Malthus,¹²⁰ and, on the other, his lumping together in the theory of natural selection two absolutely separate things: "1 - selection by the pressure of overpopulation . . ." and "2 - selection by greater capacity of adaptation to altered circumstances. . . ." ¹²¹ Here is a criticism of considerable importance. According to Engels, the concept of the struggle for existence should be rigorously limited to the first, and both he and Marx felt that far more attention should be paid the second than Darwin in fact gave it. They are constantly themselves stressing, or calling attention favourably to works which stress the importance of the influence of the conditions of life, of changes in environment, of soil, food, climate, geological structure, migrations and other modification of habits of life — in short, of adaptation of the organism to its environment and the acquisition of new characteristics thereby.¹²²

Except for this general emphasis on environmental factors neither Marx nor Engels offers much in the way of constructive suggestions regarding the evolutionary mechanism until they approach the problem of those higher organisms which perform the labour which "creates men." Before surveying with Engels the circumstances of this important biological transformation, let us glance briefly at some of the observations which he and Marx made about the differences between man and animal in general. At one point or another they mention most of the commonly remarked human differentia. Man is a fire-using animal.¹²³ He tames other animals and puts them into his service.¹²⁴ He can eat anything edible¹²⁵ and live in any climate.¹²⁶ He clothes himself artificially and creates his own shelter.¹²⁷ He

¹²⁰ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 73) *Anti-Dühring*, p. 78.

¹²¹ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 660-1) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 236.

¹²² See, for example, (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 660-1, 683, 706) *Ibid.*, pp. 235-6 and Chapter IX.

¹²³ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 669) *Ibid.*, p. 287.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 698-9) *Ibid.*, pp. 286-8.

¹²⁶ "He spread over the whole of the habitable globe, being the only animal that by its very nature had the power to do so. The other animals that have become accustomed to all climates — domestic animals and vermin — did not become so independently, but only in the wake of man." (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 699) *Ibid.*, p. 288.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

communicates with his fellows by articulate speech and has a highly developed brain.¹²⁸ But most of these differences Marx and Engels held to be merely derivative, not ultimate. Even man's logical methods of dealing with nature, his "understanding" so to speak, is largely different only in degree from those of animals. In a notation which he obviously intended to develop further Engels says: "All activity of the understanding we have in common with animals: *induction, deduction*, and hence also *abstraction* (Dido's [Engels' pet dog's] generic concepts: quadrupeds and bipeds), *analysis* of unknown objects (even the cracking of a nut is a beginning of analysis), *synthesis* (in animal tricks), and, as the union of both, *experiment* (in the case of new obstacles and unfamiliar situations). In their nature all these modes of procedure — hence all means of scientific investigation that ordinary logic recognizes — are absolutely the same in men and the higher animals. They differ only in degree (of development of the method in each case)." ¹²⁹

In fact, say Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*, "men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence . . .," ¹³⁰ a production in the course of which they change nature profoundly and exert a lasting effect on their environment.¹³¹ Here Marx and Engels find the ultimate differentiation from which they believed most of the others to be derivable. Not that animals themselves do not produce: we saw above (p. 50) that Marx recognizes certain primitive and instinctive forms of productive labour which man shares with other animals, and Engels likewise notes that the ant, the bee and the beaver also produce. The difference, they say, between animal and human labour is that human labour is not *only* primitive and instinctive; it has the character, as Engels puts it, of "premeditated, planned action directed toward definite ends known in advance," and the character of the change effected on

¹²⁸ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 697) *Ibid.*, p. 284.

¹²⁹ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 637-8) *Ibid.*, p. 203.

¹³⁰ (I, 5, 10) p. 7.

¹³¹ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 701) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 290.

the environment is accordingly different and far more extensive. "The animal," says Engels, "destroys the vegetation of a locality without realizing what it is doing. Man destroys it in order to sow field crops on the soil thus released, or to plant trees or vines which he knows will yield many times the amount sown."¹⁸² Again, this is not to say that animals are necessarily unable to act according to plan. Pre-human behaviour, from that of the wily fox to that of the insectivorous plant, observes Engels, frequently resembles the planned behaviour of men,¹⁸³ and Marx notes that "a spider carries on operations resembling those of a weaver; and many a human architect is put to shame by the skill with which a bee constructs her cell."¹⁸⁴ Indeed, as Engels remarked, the investigatory behaviour of the higher animals often resembles the pattern of human scientific methods itself, though it is undoubtedly instinctive and entirely unconscious.

The chief difference then, Marx and Engels believe, is that with man "consciousness takes the place of instinct or . . . his instinct is a conscious one;"¹⁸⁵ or, as Marx puts it in connection with his architectural bee, "What distinguishes the most incompetent architect from the best of bees, is that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he constructs it in reality. The labour process ends in the creation of something which, when the process began, already existed in the worker's imagination, already existed in an ideal form. Not merely does he bring about a change of form in natural objects, but he also realizes, in the nature that exists apart from himself, his own purpose, the purpose which gives the law to his activities, the purpose to which he has to subordinate his own will. Nor is this subordination a momentary act . . . his purposive will, manifesting itself as attention, must be operative throughout the whole duration of the labour."¹⁸⁶ Thus ultimately for Marx and Engels it is not mere production, nor merely method in production that distin-

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 701-2) *Ibid.*, p. 291.

¹⁸⁴ *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 198.

¹⁸⁵ (I, 5, 20) *The German Ideology*, p. 20.

¹⁸⁶ *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 198.

guishes men from beasts; it is *consciousness* of method in production.

This is undoubtedly why Engels feels able to assert that the difference lies not in the activity of understanding or scientific method in behaviour, but only in dialectical thought — precisely because dialectical thought “presupposes investigation of the nature of concepts.”¹³⁷ This is doubtless also why he says that ultimately human history is “differentiated from natural history as the evolutionary process of *self-conscious* organisms.”¹³⁸ And Engels believed that this was certainly why “all the planned action of all animals has never resulted in impressing the stamp of their will upon nature,” why man was required to accomplish this. For, “if animals exert a lasting effect on their environment, it happens unintentionally, and, as far as the animals themselves are concerned, it is an accident.”¹³⁹ If the roving ape horde increases the productivity of its feeding ground, this is only by fertilizing it unconsciously with its own excrements. “Unlike the hunter, the wolf does not spare the doe which would provide it with young deer in the next year.”¹⁴⁰ Man alone, because he is a conscious planner and producer, has been able to change the face of nature so extensively and thoroughly that in its inhabitable parts there remains little to bear witness to its former condition. In his productive labours not only has he built cities, tunneled mountains, dug canals, created lakes, made deserts out of forests and parks out of swamps, but he has transformed the surface, vegetation, and even climate and fauna of whole continents. Not only has he shifted animals and plants, along with himself from one place to another, but by conscious artificial methods over long periods of time has succeeded in so altering the character of both that they become unrecognizable.¹⁴¹ In short, the history of nature is in no inconsiderable part the history of man’s conscious manipulation and modification of it, and “the consequences of his activity can disappear only with the general

¹³⁷ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 638) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 203.

¹³⁸ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 610) *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹³⁹ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 701, 493–4) *Ibid.*, pp. 290–1, cf. 18.

¹⁴⁰ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 698) *Ibid.*, p. 286, cf. 285.

¹⁴¹ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 616, 702) *Ibid.*, pp. 172, 290.

extinction of the terrestrial globe.”¹⁴² “The final, essential distinction between man and others animals,” then, according to Engels, is this: “The animal merely *uses* external nature, and brings about changes in it simply by his presence; man by his changes makes it serve his ends, *masters* it.”¹⁴³ And this distinction, like all others, is ultimately traceable to labour.

Precisely how does labour accomplish these important differentiations? Engels’ suggestions on this problem were offered in a highly interesting though equally highly speculative essay entitled “The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man.”¹⁴⁴ In the title alone we already find answered the question of what organic being it was that performed Engels’ man-creating labour. It was the ape — probably, according to Engels, that highly developed species of tree-climbing anthropoid whose approximate description was given by Darwin.¹⁴⁵ As an immediate consequence of their climbing mode of life, these creatures’ hands, Engels believed, developed characteristically different functions from their feet, a development which led, first, to the employment of their hands for collecting and holding food, constructing protective roofs between the branches as do modern chimpanzees, and wielding clubs and throwing fruits and stones at their enemies; and, second, to the abandonment of the use of their hands when moving on level ground and the consequent gradual adoption of an erect gait. This freeing of the hand for more and more highly specialized functions was the decisive step in the transition from ape to man.¹⁴⁶ “The specialization of the hand — this implies the *tool*, and the tool implies specific human activity, the transforming reaction of man on nature, production.”¹⁴⁷ And labour was responsible. “Thus the hand is not only the organ of labour, *it is also the product of labour*. Only by labour, by adaptation to ever new operations, by inheritance of the resulting special development

¹⁴² (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 494) *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁴³ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 702) *Ibid.*, p. 291.

¹⁴⁴ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 693–706) Published in English as Chapter IX of *Dialectics of Nature*.

¹⁴⁵ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 693) *Op. Cit.*, p. 279.

¹⁴⁶ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 693–4) *Ibid.*, pp. 279–81.

¹⁴⁷ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 493) *Ibid.*, p. 17.

of muscles, ligaments, and, over long periods of time, bones as well, and by the ever-renewed employment of these inherited improvements in new, more complicated operations, has the human hand attained [its present] high degree of perfection."¹⁴⁸

The point of chief theoretical interest here in connection with the evolutionary mechanism is Engels' relative disregard of the influence of struggle for existence, of survival of the fittest, of natural selection, and his relative emphasis on the adaptation of the organism to its modes of life. Connected with this is his insistence on the *interactive* nature of the relationship between the organism and its environment. If the organism by its activity changes the character of the environment, so does the character of the environment change the actual form and function of the organism. If the demands of the modes of life transformed the paw into a hand, the new flexibility of this organ enabled it to transform the organism's modes of life, to create new conditions of nature. When this Marxian conception of the interactive character of the labour process is fully grasped, the "first egg" question which might otherwise arise is rendered meaningless. In relation to the Marxian understanding of "labour," it cannot be significantly asked whether labour or man was actually historically prior. To do so would be to misconceive the nature of labour, to reify mechanistically that which is essentially an interactive process, an exchange of matter within nature, as Marx called it and as the above passages illustrate, in which both protagonists, man and his environment, are transformed.

For the next point in his argument, Engels turns directly to Darwin, to the well-known law of correlation of growth, according to which, as Engels phrases it, "changes in certain forms involve changes in the form of other parts of the body." The specialization of the hand for labour is paralleled by the adaptation of the feet for erect gait.¹⁴⁹ The further development of both, and the increasing complexity of labour "helped to bring the members of society closer together by multiplying

¹⁴⁸ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 695) *Ibid.* p. 281.

¹⁴⁹ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 695) *Ibid.*, p. 282.

cases of mutual support, joint activity, and by making clear the advantage of this joint activity to each individual." Thus, according to Engels, the mode of productive life gave rise to the need for more refined forms of communication. Slowly the undeveloped larynx of the ape adapted itself to this new function, the organs of the mouth became specialized in the pronunciation of articulate speech, and, in correlation with labour and speech, the brain developed and grew larger until it eventually became that of man.¹⁵⁰ Here again the relationship is interactive: ". . . the development of the brain and its attendant senses, of the increasing clarity of consciousness, power of abstraction and of judgment, gave an ever-renewed impulse to the further development of both labour and speech," a development which at last both produced and was given further impetus by "a new element which came into play with the appearance of fully-fledged man, *viz.*, *society*."¹⁵¹

As before, Engels ignores natural selection throughout this. Emphasis, if any in this connection, is placed on mutual support rather than on competition, but the burden of the process is again made to rest on adaptation of the organism to its environment, in its transformation by the exigencies of its productive relations with nature. And here again the interactive, multilinear character of the causal process is stressed, this time not only in the relation between man and nature but also in that of the development of the various organs with which man confronts nature.

The eventual outcome of this labour-conditioned evolutionary development may be appropriately summarized in Engels' own words: "By the cooperation of hands, organs of speech, and brain, not only in each individual, but also in society, human beings become capable of executing more and more complicated operations, and of setting themselves, and achieving, higher and higher aims. With each generation, labour itself became different, more perfect, more diversified. Agriculture was added to hunting and cattle-breeding, then spinning, weaving, metal-

¹⁵⁰ (1, *Sonderausgabe*, 697) *Ibid.*, pp. 283-4.

¹⁵¹ (1, *Sonderausgabe*, 697) *Ibid.*, p. 285.

working, pottery and navigation. Along with trade and industry, there appeared finally art and science. From tribes there developed nations and states. Law and politics arose, and with them the fantastic reflection of human things in the human mind: religion. In the face of all these creations, which appeared in the first place to be products of the mind, and which seemed to dominate human society, the more modest productions of the working hand retreated into the background, the more so since the mind that plans the labour process already at a very early stage of development of society (e.g. already in the simple family), was able to have the labour that had been planned carried out by other hands than its own. All merit for the swift advance of civilization was ascribed to the mind, to the development and activity of the brain. Men became accustomed to explain their actions from their thoughts, instead of their needs — (which in any case are reflected and come to consciousness in the mind) — and so there arose in the course of time that idealistic outlook on the world which, especially since the decline of the ancient world, has dominated men's minds. It still rules them to such a degree that even the most materialistic natural scientists of the Darwinian school are still unable to form any clear idea of the origin of man, because under this ideological influence they do not recognize the part that has been played therein by labour." ¹⁵²

Following Lewis Morgan, Engels gives a more elaborate account of these later phases of human development in Chapter I of his *Origin of the Family*. But our concern here is with his conception of the initial biological, rather than the later social aspect of the problem, and the essay we have been examining, though, like so much of the evolutionary discussion and controversy of his day, it is highly speculative and conjectural, gives a clear enough picture. While here and in other writings, he and Marx recognize the possible causal role of many of the factors that were commonly being proposed as involved in evolution, Engels' inclination here is distinctly toward Lamarckian types of explanation, and he finds the *primary* causal agent in man's

¹⁵² (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 700) *Ibid.*, pp. 288-9.

biological evolution to be neither competition nor co-operation, neither natural selection nor communication nor consciousness, but man's adaptation to the basic requirements of his life upon the earth, the productive relations he bears with nature in the labour process. In this process, Engels sees him as becoming the only one amongst the animals capable of creating his own conditions of life, capable of making his own history. "The history of animals is made for them,"¹⁵³ he says; their "normal existence is given by the conditions in which they live and to which they adapt themselves."¹⁵⁴ Man alone can produce the conditions in which he lives. Man alone is capable of making his own history — but, as we are now prepared to see, neither Marx nor Engels believes that man has made it yet.

¹⁵³ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 494) *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁵⁴ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 626) *Ibid.*, p. 187.

CHAPTER VII

The Condition of Being Human: Production

MAN'S CHIEF DIGNITY, Marx and Engels believed, lay precisely in that biological endowment which ultimately distinguished him in their eyes from all other animals — the ability, for which man's labour in the course of evolutionary development was primarily responsible, to manipulate and transform nature in accordance with his own purposes, and to make his own history consciously. Here he was unique amongst animals. "The normal existence of animals," says Engels, "is given by the conditions in which they live and to which they adapt themselves — those of man, as soon as he differentiates himself from the animal in the narrower sense, have as yet never been present, and are only to be elaborated in the ensuing historical development. Man is the sole animal capable of working his way out of the merely animal state — his normal state is one appropriate to his consciousness, one to be created by himself." ¹⁵⁵ This, then is the most specific content Marx and Engels felt able to give to their general definition of man as the animal that is conscious of method in production: man is a consciously nature-controlling and history-making animal.

But as Engels himself says, all definitions, just because of their vague generality and emptiness of content, are of little scientific value. A science of human nature must concern itself with man's actual behaviour, with what man in fact does. The question then is, how much of a nature-controller is man in fact and how successful has he actually been in the making of history?

A rough but concrete answer to the first part of the question will perhaps suggest itself to the reader, as it did to Marx and Engels, if he compares the aspect of that portion of the earth's surface at which he finds himself at this moment, with what it must have been at that remote epoch when the human race

¹⁵⁵ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 626) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 187.

first climbed down from the trees. Unless by some freak peregrination of the printed word he happens to be reading this on a polar ice-cap or in a primeval forest — that is, if, more normally, he is in a pent-house or a farmhouse, an airplane or a subway, a haystack or a library, the contrast is obvious. Even if he is in a tent in the Mesopotamian desert, he may properly reflect as did Engels¹⁸⁶ that the desert was once a forest and that the transformation is a consequence of the actions of human beings. Yes, the changes which men have wrought on nature's face have been enormous, and the extent of them is a partial measure of his mastery over her.

A better measure, however, because more exactly determinable and because it includes control which man may not yet have exercised extensively though possessing it in fact, is furnished by the history of technology. Here, from the conch shell to the radiolocator, from the sharpened stick to the tractor-combine, the ox-cart to the airplane, the water-wheel to the hydro-electric generator, can be traced step by step the progressive augmentation of his power in the conquest of nature's multiple domains, the narrowing of the gap between his actual state and his ideal definition. There were no radios, tractors, airplanes or dynamos when Engels wrote, but even in the heyday of the steam engine he could already justly assert ". . . we have subdued the forces of nature and pressed them into the service of mankind; we have thereby infinitely multiplied production, so that a child now produces more than a hundred adults previously did."¹⁸⁷ And he could, without too great tribute to idealism, define man as the animal which *masters* nature.

At the same time Engels realized that this kind of talk, precisely because of its possible idealistic implications, might be misleading. While quite willing to pat man on the back for his genuine achievements in the conscious control of nature, for his technological, scientific, and even literary and artistic triumphs, for, in short, the "conditions of life appropriate to his consciousness" which he had managed to forge out of an intractable na-

¹⁸⁶ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 702) *Ibid.*, p. 292.

¹⁸⁷ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 495) *Ibid.*, p. 19.

ture, at the same time he did not want him to assume that the conquest was complete, that it was purged of the dialectical worm, nor did he want it interpreted as a conquest of mind over matter, soul over body, man over nature, in the traditional idealistic meaning of these phrases. "Let us not . . . flatter ourselves overmuch," he says, "on account of our human conquest over nature. For each such conquest takes its revenge on us. Each of them, it is true, has in the first place the consequences on which we counted, but in the second and third places it has quite different, unforeseen effects which only too often cancel out the first."¹⁵⁸ We raze our forests for timber and cultivable land and unwittingly create thereby the conditions for deserts and dustbowls. ". . . in nature nothing takes place in isolation. Everything affects every other thing and *vice versa*, and it is usually because this many-sided motion and interaction is forgotten that our natural scientists are prevented from clearly seeing the simplest things."¹⁵⁹ Here, then, is the dialectical worm: while we are highly successful in bringing about the immediate results of our conscious intentions, we still too often fail to anticipate and forestall the undesired remoter consequences of those results themselves.

If these dialectical considerations remind man on the one hand that he still has much to learn in his contest with nature, they warn him on the other not to be deceived about the character of his relations with it. Man is not something different from nature, but a part of it. ". . . at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature — but that we, with flesh, blood, and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other beings of being able to know and correctly apply its laws."¹⁶⁰

With these qualifications, and with the injunction implicit in them that man should not rest on his definitional laurels but learn to control the remote as well as the immediate conse-

¹⁵⁸ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 702) *Ibid.*, pp. 291-2.

¹⁵⁹ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 700) *Ibid.*, pp. 289-90.

¹⁶⁰ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 703) *Ibid.*, p. 292.

quences of his actions, Marx and Engels were more than cheerful about man's progress in the technological sphere. ". . . in fact," says Engels, "with every day that passes we are learning to understand these laws more correctly and getting to know both the more immediate and the more remote consequences of our interference with the traditional course of nature. In particular, after the mighty advances of natural science in the present century, we are more and more getting to know and hence to control, even the more remote natural consequences at least of our more ordinary productive activities. [And] the more this happens, the more will men not only feel, but also know, their unity with nature, and thus the more impossible will become the senseless and anti-natural idea of a contradiction between mind and matter, man and nature, soul and body. . . ." ¹⁶¹

In these passages perhaps more than anywhere else historical materialism freely uses the concepts of traditional idealistic humanism: emphasis is on the conscious, purposive, voluntary, creative phases of human as distinct from animal nature. Yet there can be no question about the materialistic naturalistic character of its ultimate commitments.

If Marx and Engels looked upon man as a nature-controller and found him good, they were far from pleased with him in regard to the second part of his "definition." As a *history-making* animal, as a creator, director and custodian of appropriate conditions of life in the *social* sphere, they could not judge him without reference to the blood and fire, the poverty, pestilence, hatred and misery in which he has written his relations with his fellows. And when they considered that his latest achievement in history making, the capitalist system, was by and large the highest social creation of which he had yet been capable, they could not but feel gloomy about his present mastery of the technique, for it need scarcely be urged that neither of them regarded the capitalist system as the truly appropriate way of human living. ¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 703) *Ibid.*, pp. 292-3.

¹⁶² Perhaps the most burning indictments are contained in *Capital*, in Engels' two works, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, and *The Housing Question*, and in *The Communist Manifesto*.

Here in the social sphere, Marx and Engels maintained, the dialectical situation is truly troublesome. In the control of nature, that is, in the sphere of mere material production, man accomplishes his intended results, even the remote ones, more often than not. But in the making of history, failure is still the general rule. Human action "achieves its desired end only by way of exception and, much more frequently, the exact opposite." In all our acts, even in the case of the most developed peoples of the present day, "we find that there still exists . . . a colossal disproportion between the proposed aims and the results arrived at, that unforeseen effects predominate, and that the uncontrolled forces are far more powerful than those set into motion according to plan."¹⁶³ In fact, on the basis of his record of achievement to date it can be said that man has made history very badly indeed, if, indeed, he has made any real history at all. And if human history, as distinct from cosmic and biological history, is defined as the development of consciously intended social relations that are appropriate to human life, human potentialities, human consciousness, and the already achieved degree of human control over nature, then there has not yet been any "human" history at all.

Man, the only animal capable of making his own history consciously, Marx and Engels believed, has not made it yet. He has made history, and it is the history of him, but it is not truly human history. In a sense, what was true when man ceased being an ape is still true: the normal conditions of his existence have as yet never been present, they are still to be elaborated in the ensuing historical development, the state appropriate to his consciousness still remains to be created by himself. "Only conscious organization of social production," says Engels, "in which production and distribution are carried on in a planned way, can lift mankind above the rest of the animal world as regards the social aspect, in the same way that production in general has done this for men in their aspect as species."¹⁶⁴ And when Marx

¹⁶³ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 494) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 19.

¹⁶⁴ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 495) *Ibid.*, p. 19.

speaks of the present bourgeois social formation as "the closing chapter of the pre-historic stage of human society," he thereby deliberately withholds the term history from anything that has happened so far.¹⁰⁸

These rather challenging observations raise certain obvious problems, the examination of which will constitute the remainder of this study. The present and the next two chapters will try to discover why it is, according to Marx and Engels, that man, the history-making animal, has been so little successful in the performance of his distinguishing function — to determine the precise conditions that have inhibited the realization of his powers, and to show, by means of an examination of the economic and social factors that are operative in the determination and transformation of human nature, why man, though he has been able to subdue the forces of nature and press them into his service, has himself remained a slave to the forces of society, forces which give history a form so inappropriate to his consciousness. The final chapters will consider the most difficult of all the problems raised by the present inquiry, the problem of what is to be done, or, more specifically, what, according to Marx and Engels, the human being himself can and should do about history, and hence about himself. This, of course, is the central theoretical problem which the Marxian anthropology creates. It is implicit in all that we have been discussing. It is implicit in the very dual nature of historical materialism as a science of society and a call to action. In Marx's famous last thesis on Feuerbach it becomes explicit: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways: the point, however, is to *change* it." To put this issue sharply, how can Marx and Engels reconcile with their rigorous realism, naturalism, materialism — yes, with their historical determinism — the ethical injunction which their entire philosophy constitutes? In their complaint that man has made bad history is implicit their belief that he ought to, and can, create good history, that is, his-

¹⁰⁸ Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 357.

tory appropriate to the values which his consciousness establishes. How can this be? In short, what is the role of the ethical factor in the development of human nature?

The problem before us now is the first one, why is it that man, who has dealt with nature so effectively, has made such a failure of history, or what is the same thing for Marx and Engels: under the tyranny of what economico-social forces has human nature, in their view, developed? In previous chapters it has been shown that for Marx and Engels the science of society must begin with man — with man as he actually is, not as he might be thought ideally to be — and that the test of what he actually is can only be his empirical behaviour, in short, that man is as he behaves. It has further been shown that since man's behaviour has not remained constant from the time of his initial differentiation from the ape, Marx and Engels were led to conclude that human nature is not constant, that it is not so much an entity as a process of development. The problem became the discovery of the conditions of this process, or of why man behaves precisely as he does. Pursuit of biological light on this problem disclosed several further items: that man was both a producing and a social animal, that he differed from other producing animals by the consciously methodical character of his production and from other social animals by being, except in "classless" primitive societies, a "class" animal. It remains to be determined what Marx and Engels believed to be the actual situation with respect to these various differentia. How do man's productive activities, his social nature, his class character, and his intellectual powers determine how he behaves and hence what he is? How are these related to each other and how are they themselves determined?

In the theoretical portions of their writings there is one point which Marx and Engels reiterate again and again — that the ultimate determinant of human behaviour, and hence the primary conditioning factor in the transformation of human nature, is the mode of production which men employ in the maintenance of human life. Production, they say, "is the first historical act" both in point of time and in point of causal priority. Moreover, assuming for reasons that we have seen in Chapters

III and V that this production of livelihood is the central expression of human life viewed *en masse*, they claim that as men express their life "so are they. What they are, therefore coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce."¹⁶⁶ Since man is as man produces, it follows for Marx and Engels that human nature, in its process of evolutionary development, is ultimately revealed in human productive activity, that "'the history of humanity' must always be studied and treated in relation to the history of industry and exchange."¹⁶⁷

The language of some of these pronouncements suggests that we are dealing with an occupational or technological theory of human nature. Other Marxian statements point unmistakably to a class theory. Which of the two Marx and Engels ultimately held, or if both, how they integrated them in their general understanding of man we shall have, later, to probe. Meanwhile it is clear that what they are offering here is intended at least to be a working guide for the "study" and "treatment" of the problem of human nature; it is clearly a canon of procedure; it enjoins the investigator of man to search for light in the mode of production rather than in such tempting but, in the Marxian view, relatively extraneous, realms as those of the mode of religion, of art, philosophy, law, or politics. Does it, however, do more than this? Does it enable one to anticipate the results of empirical investigation, to know in advance, at least in general outline, what the concrete study of a given historical epoch will bring to light about the human beings of that epoch? Does it afford any sort of control, any possibility for human beings, by consciously manipulating the determining factors, to direct the change in human nature into certain specific channels rather than others?

These questions can be answered only by an examination of the historical materialist theory of production. It is clear that the mode of production of any given period is held ultimately responsible for the character of human nature of that period and

¹⁶⁶ (I, 5, 11) *The German Ideology*, p. 7.

¹⁶⁷ (I, 5, 19) *Ibid.*, p. 18.

the direction of its future development. But what of the mode of production itself? Clearly it is not *sui generis*; clearly it does not exist in a void, but always, like everything else Marxian, in a concrete historical setting. According to Marx and Engels it must always be regarded as a definite form of activity of individuals, "a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part."¹⁶⁸ What, then, is it? What are the conditions under which it takes place?

An obvious condition of production in any historical epoch is a need of one sort or another experienced by the animal organism. Without a need it is highly improbable that the organism would initiate production; a man who knew no hunger would scarcely plant crops, a man who felt neither heat, cold, vanity, shame, nor the need for a medium of exchange to satisfy other wants, would not make clothes. Production, then, first of all presupposes need, and it becomes inferentially evident that human needs are a factor — direct or indirect — in the transformation of human nature. An obvious problem for investigation thus becomes the derivation of human needs, but equally obviously; this leads finally out of the province of social science into that of biology, and there Marx and Engels were content finally to leave it. But they felt that one important generalization could be made about needs at the level of historical fact: needs are never atomic; there is the same dialectically processive character about the needs which call forth production as there is about the needs which are to be observed operating at the level of simple animal metabolism:¹⁶⁹ "as soon as a need is satisfied, (which implies the action of satisfying, and the acquisition of an instrument),"¹⁷⁰ new needs are made." Thus, apart from biology, it may be said that production produces needs, "and this production of new needs," they add, "is the first historical act."¹⁷¹ It is the first historical act because like all else in the Marxian universe, production itself is dialectical in character: production arises from need, and in satisfying that need, produces new

¹⁶⁸ (I, 5, 11) *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁶⁹ See above, p. 60.

¹⁷⁰ A second condition of production; see below, p. 86.

¹⁷¹ (I, 5, 18) *The German Ideology*, pp. 16-17.

ones.¹⁷² Human needs, then, are not atomic, but dialectically progressive.

So far we have been in the realm of a single condition of production, the condition which Marx variously refers to as "labour itself," "purposive human activity," or "the subject, mankind." Even here the dialectics of production and hence of human determination, is of considerable complexity. But there are still other conditions. If production presupposes the existence of a needing organism, it also presupposes the existence of that which is needed; if there is "the subject, mankind," there is also "the object, nature."¹⁷³ For indeed, as Marx says in *Capital*, production in whatever particular form it may appear, is essentially an activity carried on for the fitting of natural substances to human wants, for the accomplishment of an exchange of matter between man and nature. A second condition of production, then, and one which may be equally instrumental with human needs in determining its form, is the character of the environment in which the needs arise. "The way in which men produce their means of subsistence," say Marx and Engels, "depends first of all on the actual means they find in existence and have to reproduce."¹⁷⁴

In this phase too the dialectical relationship exhibits some complexity. The theoretically direct exchange of matter between

¹⁷² This among other things, is what Marx is asserting when in another place (an unfinished manuscript discovered after his death and published in English as an appendix to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*) he talks about the production-consumption relationship, exhibiting it as one of essential interdependence. "Production," he says, "is at the same time consumption and consumption is at the same time production. Each is directly its own counterpart. But at the same time an intermediary movement goes on between the two. . . . Without production, no consumption; but, on the other hand, without consumption, no production, since production would then be without a purpose" (*Op. cit.*, p. 278). "Each appears as the means of the other and as being brought about by the other, which is expressed as their mutual interdependence; a relation by virtue of which they appear as mutually connected and indispensable, yet remaining outside of each other" (p. 281). "Consumption produces production in two ways. In the first place, in that . . . a product as distinguished from a mere natural object, proves to be such, first becomes a product in consumption. . . . In the second place, consumption produces production by creating the necessity for new production, i.e., by providing the ideal, inward, impelling cause which constitutes the prerequisite for production." In its turn production produces consumption "first by furnishing the latter with material; second by determining the manner of consumption, third by creating in consumers a want for its products as objects of consumption" (pp. 278-80).

¹⁷³ *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Appendix, p. 269.

¹⁷⁴ (I, 5, 10) *The German Ideology*, p. 7.

man and nature is often in fact many times removed, for the means of production which at any given historical period men find in existence and have to reproduce are often themselves by no means pristinely natural. Nature may have already been profoundly modified by precedent generations, and the objects of production "filtered" so to speak, through previous labour. The "object" ¹⁷⁵ of labour is thus, according to Marx of two kinds: first, means of production given by nature without previous human intervention, such as, "fish, caught, and removed from their natural element, water; timber felled in the primeval forest, ores broken away from outcrop lodes," ¹⁷⁶ and second, means of production which are already results of production — "products of earlier labour processes, [which] enter into the present labour process as means of production." ¹⁷⁷ These Marx calls raw materials; examples are, nearest to the naturally given, "chance-found ores after they have been washed," and, more removed, "the seeds used in agriculture," and most animals and plants. ¹⁷⁸

Now, says Marx, "with the exception of the extractive industry (which finds its object ready made in nature, as do mining, hunting, fishing, and agriculture when this is carried on in virgin soil), all branches of industry deal with an object (Gegenstand) which is already filtered through earlier labour, is already a product of labour, an object which we term raw material . . . Animals and plants," for example, "which we are apt to regard as natural products, may not merely be the products of last year's labour, but the results of a gradual transformation which has been going on through many generations, under human control and aided by human labour." ¹⁷⁹ Nevertheless each generation and each individual producer obviously contributes something new to the means of production inherited from the past. "History," say Marx and Engels, "is nothing but the succession of the separate generations, each of which exploits the materials . . .

¹⁷⁵ Marx uses "*Gegenstand*," which most English translations render inadequately as "subject matter." I shall continue to use "object" — not, of course in the sense of "purpose" or "objective."

¹⁷⁶ *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 199.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 199, 202.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

the productive forces handed down to it by all preceding ones, and thus on the one hand continues the traditional activity in completely changed circumstances and, on the other, modifies the old circumstances with a completely changed activity."¹⁸⁰

Thus it is that the "material conditions" which determine the character of production, and hence the nature of men, include "both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity,"¹⁸¹ and the dialectics of production acquires still further complexity. What has been discovered however is something which in a sense may be considered an even more primitive determinant of human nature than that of production — a condition of production itself, and it has become possible to understand both the simplicity and the complexity of the Marxian statement that "The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production."¹⁸²

But this by no means completes the account of even the primitive structure of production and hence the cause of human change. For if the subject, mankind, involves externally a relation with nature, it involves within itself a relation that can only be called "social." "In production," says Marx, "men not only act on nature but also on one another. They produce only by co-operating in a certain way and mutually exchange their activities. In order to produce, they enter into definite connections and relations with one another and only within these social connections and relations does their action on nature, their production, take place."¹⁸³ By "social," Marx and Engels understand broadly "the co-operation of several individuals, no matter under what conditions, in what manner and to what end."¹⁸⁴ From this point of view, as we have seen, "man is in the most literal sense of the word a *zoon politikon*, not only a social animal, but an animal that can develop into an individual only in society." Likewise, man's production is social; it "presupposes the intercourse of individuals with one another;"¹⁸⁵ and this in both

¹⁸⁰ (I, 5, 34) *The German Ideology*, p. 38.

¹⁸¹ (I, 5, 11) *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *Wage-Labour and Capital, Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 264.

¹⁸⁴ (I, 5, 19) *The German Ideology*, p. 18.

¹⁸⁵ (I, 5, 11) *Ibid.*, p. 8.

phases of man's productive activity — the maintenance of his life and the propagation of his kind. When "men, who daily remake their own life, begin to make other men, to propagate their kind," the most primitive form of social relationship is established — "the relation between man and wife, parents and children, the FAMILY . . . which to begin with is the only social relationship."¹⁸⁶ Later other forms appear, involving different forms of production, but even the most primitive production takes place in a context that is social at least to the extent of the family, involving a co-operative division of labour based on sex, age, natural predispositions such as physical strength or even intellectual superiority, or perhaps merely on needs or accidents.¹⁸⁷ Thus "the production of life, both of one's own in labour and of fresh life in procreation," say Marx and Engels, ". . . appears as a double relationship: on the one hand as a natural, on the other as a social relationship."¹⁸⁸ This social relation no less than the natural one is itself a condition of production, and hence, in its own particular way, a determinant of human nature.

A fourth and final presupposition of productive activity has already been alluded to in passing. The satisfaction of a need in production, according to Marx and Engels, "implies the acquisition of an instrument," and this instrument of labour is a basic condition of the labour process. It is "the conductor of activity" between the subject, mankind, and the object, nature, the thing or complex of things "which the worker interposes between himself and the object of his labour"¹⁸⁹ in order to render the latter appropriate to his wants. The instruments of labour, then comprise the realm of tools and technique. Here the human connection is similarly complex, the dialectical situation in some ways resembling that involving "raw materials." Tools are a kind of dialectical mediator between the subject and the object of labour, both joining the human being to nature and at the same time

¹⁸⁶ (I, 5, 18) *Ibid.*, p. 17. Marx and Engels undergo some changes of opinion, in the light of developing anthropological knowledge, with regard to the order of derivation of early social formations. Compare these passages with later ones in *Origin of the Family*, pp. 10, 92 f, and in *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 386 n.

¹⁸⁷ (I, 5, 20-1) *The German Ideology*, p. 20; *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 386. *Origin of the Family*, pp. 192, 196.

¹⁸⁸ (I, 5, 19) *The German Ideology*, p. 18.

¹⁸⁹ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 199.

separating him from direct contact with her. They join him in the sense that the materials which he employs as instruments for the manipulation of nature are themselves furnished by nature — for example the wood or ore from which he fashions a plow and the ox which he uses to pull it: "just as the earth is his primitive larger, so, likewise, it is his primitive tool house."¹⁹⁰ It joins him also in the sense that it transfers his activity to nature, materializing it, incorporating labour with its object, identifying labour and nature in a *product*, in which the *process* disappears.¹⁹¹ But at the same time the realm of instruments separates the human being from direct contact with nature. Obviously it is really the tool, not nature, that man manipulates directly; he acts not on nature but on the tool so that it will act on nature. In Marx's language, "the object of which the worker takes direct control is not the 'Gegenstand' of labour but the instrument of labour."¹⁹² In this sense the instrument stands physically between man and nature. Again, the instrument itself is seldom a pure gift of nature,¹⁹³ but, like raw materials, usually in part a product of labour; the ore will not turn the earth until it has been fashioned into a plow, the animal will not pull the plow until it has been tamed, domesticated, and broken to the harness. In actual fact the vast majority of productive instruments which men have employed historically, remove their actual users many times from nature. Not only is the plow I use today not a pure gift of nature, nor even a product of my own direct manipulation of nature, but it cannot properly be said to derive from the directly creative manipulation of nature by the workers or engineers of International Harvester. A thousand ancestral generations have given it its structure, a hundred contemporary labour processes in addition to those of International Harvester lie between it and nature; extractive processes have preceded the forging and carpentry operations; mining and lumbering themselves have been mediated by their own tools —

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 199.

¹⁹³ An exception would be "the stone he uses as a missile, or for grinding, pressing, cutting, etc." *Ibid.*

picks, drills, axes and saws, each with its own elaborate history; indeed, the forests which the axes level may well be products of ancient planting operations.

These then are the four general factors which analysis of the dialectics of production reveals as structural components of that process. There is the labour itself, purposive human activity, involving the biological organism, its needs, its specific character at any given time with respect to such factors as sex and age, and its natural or acquired predispositions such as physical strength or skills. Then there is the social factor, or the manner in which the individual organisms which, collectively, constitute "the subject, mankind," are related to one another in their productive activities in any given community or set of communities; this may express itself in anything from families and tribes to trade unions, trusts, cartels and co-operative societies; hence it includes all of the many possible forms of organization for production, distribution, exchange and consumption, involving always division of labour amongst individuals or groups, and except in the primitive communal form of society, division into social and economic classes as well. These two factors together, labour and its social organization, constitute the subjective side of the process. On the objective side are the other two factors, which collectively Marx sometimes refers to as the means of production.¹⁹⁴ First, there is the natural object of labour, the immense realm of things which labour is exerted upon — on the one hand, things that are "naturally given," "without any spontaneous activity on man's part," such as the soil, water, virgin forests, fish, ores, animals and fruits, and on the other "raw materials," such as felled timber, washed ores, cultivated seeds, mined coal, sheared wool and so on. Finally there are the instruments of labour that are employed

¹⁹⁴ E.g., *Ibid.*, p. 201. "If," he says here, "we regard the whole labour process from the viewpoint of its result, the product, then both the instrument of labour and the object (*Gegenstand*) of labour assume the aspect of means of production. . . ." The difference between "means of production" and "instruments of production" is important to bear in mind if one desires a correct understanding of historical materialism. "Instruments of production" refers simply to tools and technics. "Means of production" includes the natural object of labour as well as tools and technics. There are passages in both Marx and Engels where if one, reading "means," understands "instruments," he may believe himself to be dealing with a technological theory of history. This is not Marxism. See below, p. 91 ff.

in use upon these things — animals and plants in their instrumental functions as well as inanimate objects; the latter include: mechanical instruments from the primitive stone or branch picked up from the ground for use unmodified as a hammer or lever, to the complicated machines of modern industry; instruments whose function it is to serve as containers — pipes, tubes, baskets, pitchers, vats, reservoirs, cattle-pens, systems of fencing, and so on; instruments which serve as technical adjuncts to the labour process — workshops, canals, roads, bridges, etc.; and finally, the earth itself, which, though a “natural object” of labour, is, in its function as a platform for all labour whatsoever, also an instrument.¹⁹⁸

For Marx and Engels these four factors — two subjective and two objective, roughly speaking — are presuppositions of the labour process, wherever, whenever, and in whatever particular form it appears. As general conditions of production, conditions without which production could not take place, they may be regarded as primitive determinants of all productive activity, and hence — since human nature is itself determined by the character of its productive activities — as primitive determinants of human nature.

A part, at least, of our introductory question is thus already answered: historical materialism is clearly somewhat more than a canon of procedure. As a canon of procedure it merely enjoins the student of human nature to examine the mode of production. But in its own theory of production, historical materialism does more than merely admonish; it anticipates what the empirical investigator of any given productive system will discover to be determinants of that system and hence of the nature of the men involved in it. In every case labour, society, tools and nature will, according to this theory, be found to be causally active.

Now if at this point it could be learned from Marx and Engels which of these four factors is the universally *decisive* factor — which one, granted the secondary causal involvement of all the others, is the one *primarily* responsible for precipitating the different historical modes of production, and hence the different

kinds of men which history has produced, the social scientist would be on the track of quite a marvelous instrument: a relatively simple theoretical formula for understanding past men and a potential lever for controlling the character of human nature in the future.

But this lever and this formula are not to be found in Marxism. History is very rich, its variety, novelty, breadth and movement are not conducive to the generalizations which a simple mechanics requires, and Marx and Engels bow on this to history. If the social scientist wants to know the relative causal importance of each of the four factors in the production of the human nature of a given epoch, Marx and Engels will merely tell him to go to the facts and learn. Such a question is for them one not of theory but of fact, one not for a priori pronouncement or dogma but for laborious and careful empirical investigation. All that historical materialism will "pronounce" about history at the level of the anatomy of production — all that it will assert prior to concrete study in respect to the structure of the mode of production underlying any given social formation, is that it will be found on examination to integrate in its own particular way, purposive labour, its social organization, its instruments, and its natural object. Which of these will be dominant is a matter for investigation not generalization.

It is perhaps a sad commentary on Marx's and Engels' powers of communication that nearly a century later this should have to be dwelt on. Again and again they insist that historical materialism is not a dogma, not a formula, but an empirical science and a guide to concrete study and historical investigation. Yet widespread opinion, both lay and critical, both within the Marxian movement and without, persists in treating it as though it were the reverse. Even in his own day the misconstruction moved Engels to impatience. He inveighs vigorously against those pseudo-Marxists who, without giving themselves "the trouble to study economics, the history of economics, the history of trade, of industry, of agriculture, of the formations of society . . . simply make use of the phrase historical materialism (and *everything* can be turned into a phrase) in order to get their own rela-

tively scanty historical knowledge fitted together into a neat system as quickly as possible. . . ." "Our conception of history," he says, "is above all a guide to study, not a lever for construction." . . . All history must be studied afresh, the conditions of existence of the different forms of society must be individually examined before the attempt is made to deduce from them the political, civil-legal, aesthetic, philosophic, religious, etc., notions corresponding to them." ¹⁹⁶

Among the most common and most influential of today's "pseudo-Marxists" are those who maintain that Marx held technics, or instruments, to be the key factor in production, and therefore the clue to everything. To people of monistic inclinations — and who is guiltless of them? — the technological reduction has undeniable attractions. By excluding "subjective" elements from the causal scheme it outflanks those who appeal to the whimsicality, fancifulness and general unreliability of the human personality in order to deny the possibility of a genuine science of history. With its rich opportunities for poetic parallels, it can, like modern psychoanalytic theory, be made both fascinating and plausible. Finally, like any suggestive hypothesis, it is even, within certain limitations, useful. But for all this it is not Marxian. That society is to be understood primarily in terms of production and exchange, and social history and human development in terms of a "series of revolutions in the modes of production and exchange," ¹⁹⁷ is Marxian. That production itself, and hence changes in productive methods, and hence, society, history and human nature are to be understood primarily in terms of technics or the instruments of production is not Marxian. "What these gentlemen lack," one can almost hear Engels saying of the "technologists" as he said of the "economic determinists," "is dialectics. They never see anything but here cause and there effect . . . a hollow abstraction." ¹⁹⁸

According to historical materialism all of the four conditions of production — labour, its social organization, its instruments, and its object — are responsible for determining the character

¹⁹⁶ Letter to Conrad Schmidt, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 380. My emphasis.

¹⁹⁷ (I, 6, 527) *The Communist Manifesto*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 206.

¹⁹⁸ Letter to Conrad Schmidt, October 27, 1890; *Op. Cit.*, p. 388.

of a mode of production, and hence of human nature. In the abstract they are both co-responsible and equally responsible, all being necessary conditions. In the concrete they remain co-responsible but may, in differing circumstances, exhibit unequal responsibilities. One or another of the factors, or certain combinations of them can appear as dominant, but this proves nothing about other circumstances.

In the case of modern "machinofacture" or large-scale industry, for example, technics is the nuclear factor. Here, Marx finds on concrete examination, "the revolution begins with the instruments of labour,"¹⁹⁹ and the productive organism is essentially objective in character, with the subjective factor, the worker, "nothing more than an appendage to the extant material conditions of production."²⁰⁰ But this establishes no general case for technology. For, in the system of production that was immediately antecedent to machinofacture, the system which Marx calls manufacture, he finds that the reverse was true: here "the revolution in the method of production begins with labour-power,"²⁰¹ "the organization of the social labour process is purely subjective, is a combination of detail workers."²⁰² This does not mean that technics and technics alone determined the one mode of production and labour and labour alone the other. Marx and Engels constantly stress the causal interdependence, the co-responsibility of the various determinants. If the technical innovations, "the inventions of Vaucanson, Arkwright, Watt, and others," ushered in the industrial revolution, they themselves were possible of utilization only because of the labour situation, "because these inventors found ready to hand a suitable number of skilled mechanics who were placed at their disposal thanks to the manufacturing period."²⁰³ The steam engine, in fact, that most revolutionary of modern instruments, was invented, as Engels points out,²⁰⁴ some two thousand years before its perfection and employment were possible, its productive ap-

¹⁹⁹ *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 405.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 421.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 405.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 421.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 417.

²⁰⁴ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 540) *Dialectics of Nature*, pp. 80-1.

plication having to await — in addition to such social conjunctions of events as Marx, and such scientific ones as Engels, mention — the “natural” one of the discovery of coal as a fuel. On its side, the manufacturing system was no more independent of instruments than the modern one is of labour; indeed, no system whatsoever is independent of instruments: “just as a man needs lungs to breathe,” says Marx, “so he needs something that is the work of human hands before he can consume the forces of nature for productive processes. A water wheel is necessary for the exploitation of the motive power of water, and a steam engine for the exploitation of the elasticity of steam.”²⁰⁵ In short, labour and technics are always co-responsible for a given system of production. In different situations one or the other of them may be dominant.

Again, if neither labour nor technics must be slighted in favour of the other, nature must not be overlooked for either of them. “Different communities,” says Marx, “find in their natural environment different means of production and different means of subsistence. *Consequently* their methods of production, modes of life, and products are different.”²⁰⁶ Though no one could dispute the importance to the industry of the Netherlands of the development of the windmill, a technical or instrumental factor, it was a natural factor, according to Marx, which was responsible for this very development: it was the absence, in the lowlands, of streams with a good head of water and the need for keeping water out of places where it was not wanted; this “compelled the Dutch to resort to wind as a motive power.”²⁰⁷ Soil can be largely influential in promoting or retarding the evolution of a mode of production. When nature is too bountiful she controls men, keeping them by kindness from developing their productive forces. When she is less lavish, men are forced to control her, to devise means for exploiting to the fullest whatever gifts she gives.²⁰⁸ Generalizing again about the role of nature, Marx has this to say: “Apart from the degree of development of

²⁰⁵ *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 422.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 386. Emphasis mine.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 409 n.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 563.

social production, the productivity of labour is fettered by natural conditions. These are all referable to the 'nature' of human beings . . . and to the 'nature' which forms man's environment. The latter may be classified under two main heads: (1) natural wealth in the means of subsistence, i.e., a fertile soil, waters teeming with fish, etc.; and (2) natural wealth in the means of labour, such as waterfalls, navigable rivers, timber, ores, coal, etc. In the earlier days of civilization, it is the former kind that is of decisive importance; in higher phases of social development it is the latter."²⁰⁹

Finally, the social factor may, in specific periods, outweigh all the others in importance. Such, for example, was clearly the case according to Engels in the primitive or gentile society, where systems of family and kinship relations quite dominated the mode of production.²¹⁰ And Marx, with Engels, in *The German Ideology*, points to "the simple family and the multiple, the so-called tribe," as the premise and basis of civil society which is "the true source and theatre of all history," — "determined by the existing productive forces . . . and in its turn determining these."²¹¹ In the same social category, the role of the division of labour can be immense. Engels speaks of it as the "basic form of all production hitherto," as "the lever of production which, prior to the introduction of large-scale industry, was by far the most powerful."²¹² In another place he makes it the chief agent in the transition from the primitive communal mode of production to the commodity production of civilized society: "It undermined the communism of production and consumption, it made the appropriation of products by single individuals the prevailing rule, and thus introduced the exchange between individuals. . . . Gradually, the production of commodities became the rule."²¹³ Marx has no less respect than has Engels for its causal efficacy. "Is the whole inner organization of nations with all their international relations," he asks in a letter to Annenkov, "anything other

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 562.

²¹⁰ *Origin of the Family*, p. 10. Cf. (I, 5, 18) *The German Ideology*, p. 17.

²¹¹ (I, 5, 25) p. 26.

²¹² (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 301, 303) *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 316, 318.

²¹³ *Origin of the Family*, p. 212.

than the expression of a particular division of labour? And must not these change when the division of labour changes?"²¹⁴ Again and again, when discussing guild organizations, trade unions, monopolies, slave labour, class divisions, rural economy and innumerable other social forms past and present, Marx and Engels express their recognition of the independent causal efficacy of social factors — independent not in the sense of ever being divorced from labour, nature, and technics within a given productive constellation, but in the sense of being able to have equal, superior, or subordinate causal status with the others in different historical circumstances. Indeed, if any further refutation of the technological interpretation of historical materialism were required, it need only be pointed out that the Marxian revolutionary injunction calls upon the workers of the world to direct their energies not against the present instruments of production but against the social relations in which they are currently encompassed. The transition from the capitalist to the socialist mode of production demands the scrupulous preservation of capitalist technics; what goes overboard is the set of social relations whereby the fruits of these instruments of production are privately appropriated. The change is accomplished not by tampering with the technics, but by the substitution of public for the present private ownership of them — a social, and not a technical matter.

No, no monism, technological or other, can be made out of the Marxian theory of production. And, concerning the question of human nature, it is clear that no easy formula has been provided by the information offered about the causal components of production. All that is known is that labour, society, tools, and nature, acting through particular productive configurations, are the chief agents in the modification of men; their relative importance in these particular configurations, and therefore the relative importance of their respective actions on men, is not deducible from the Marxian theory of production. This, it is maintained, can only be discovered by a concrete and exhaustive diagnosis of the productive organism in question. If the so-

cial scientist wishes to understand the behaviour, and hence the nature, of the humans of Pongo-Pongo, he must explore the local determinism obtaining within their mode of production; this is a chore which historical materialism will not spare him; nor will it even assure him that what he finds dominant in the Pongo-Pongo system will hold for that of the Bushwhacks — even though both peoples be stone-users, totemites, geographical neighbors and ethnic kin.

And yet for all its latitude in the theory of production, historical materialism is no mere causal eclecticism. The Marxian-guided researcher into the ultimate whys of the humans of Pongo-Pongo knows in advance where and where not to look for causes. Rightly or wrongly he will explore the roots of production and waste no time, if time be valuable, on its cultural accoutrements and by-products; these may be highly interesting, for the descriptive ethnologist they may be indispensable, but for the historical materialist they help rather on *what* the behaviour pattern is than on *why* it is thus. Moreover, if he is a man of dialectical sensibilities, the student will approach his field with a certain amount of foreknowledge of the general *modus operandi* of the four causes if not of their specific relative importance. Actually it is not they severally, nor even in simple sum total, but the *mode of production* which they constitute that establishes the character of human nature and the direction of its future development. And actually it is not their mere numerical co-presence but their particular manner of co-ordination that constitutes the mode of production itself. The situation is not mechanical but dialectical. Its logic is not that of the relation between a whole and its parts but more nearly that of the relation between a field and its lines of force. If labour, society, tools and nature determine the mode of production and the character of human nature, they do so not by their specific and static content as elements, not by their mutual impact as mechanical entities, but by their dynamic interpenetration, their dialectical integration as processes.

So, while there is less than metaphysics, there is more than methodological precept in the Marxian theory of production.

One of the four factors dialectically involved in the elaborate dynamics of production is precisely the human factor, the subject mankind, the needing organism, purposive human activity—in short, and collectively speaking, that very human nature whose modification is the central subject of the investigation in question. The investigator knows that the relation between the four factors is one of interdependence, interaction, mutual transfiguration. He knows in advance, therefore, that human nature will both modify and be modified by the processes which involve it with nature, those which involve it with society, and those which involve it with instruments, and that each of these processes will acquire its specific character from the character of the total configuration of which they are dialectical constituents.

This may not be very novel, but, for better or worse, it is Marxian. And it is perhaps a good deal to have learned both about Marxism and history for anyone who has approached both with a lust for the absolute.

Is there, then, no backbone to the historical materialist theory of human causality? Is there nothing more to this theory than the statement that there are four determinants whose action is dialectical in character? At the level of the Marxian "anatomy of production," no. At the level of its "physiology of history," however, there is a great deal more, and it is therefore to this that we must turn in the next section.

CHAPTER VIII

Suffering I: Classes

THE ANATOMY OF PRODUCTION with which we dealt in the last chapter, comprises only the analytical phase of Marxian economic theory: it deals really with little more than the meaning and implications which the general concept of production offers to analysis; its usefulness to the present study has been simply in clarifying what is meant by the assertion that the human nature of a given period is ultimately determined by the mode of production of that period. As we have remarked, however, historical materialism is primarily interested not in why human nature can abstractly be said to be what it is, but in why concretely it changes from epoch to epoch. If what human nature is at any given period is determined by the underlying mode of production, then the *change* in human nature should obviously be referable ultimately to the sequences of changes in modes of production. It follows then that the central clue to the anthropological problem for the historical materialist is to be found not in the Marxian anatomy of production but in its physiology of history. If the anatomy deals with the abstract structure of production, the physiology deals with the actual movement of the historical development of productive systems. Its method must be inductive rather than formal, synthetic rather than analytical.

This phase of Marxism is much better known than that which we have heretofore considered, and though it is no less frequently misunderstood, the large body of critical and expository writings that has accumulated around it leaves this less excusable and makes it possible for the present treatment of the problem to be briefly expository rather than elaborately probative.

Briefly, then, Marx and Engels, surveying the sweep of the historical development of productive systems, felt able to draw certain distinctions of fact, and, on the basis of what they took to be certain recurrences of developmental pattern, to set up for the macrocosm of history, if not for its local units, a relatively simple, though still dialectical, law of movement. The four

generic types of productive systems which they distinguished in the past and under which all the specific modes of production of different historical epochs and particular cultures seemed to them to be subsumable, and the fifth which they forecast for the immediate future, are too well known to need more than summary mention here.

The most primitive type, which Marx usually refers to as the Asiatic,²¹⁵ and Engels as the gentile,²¹⁶ is more commonly spoken of today as the system of primitive communism. Characteristic of this type, which still seems reflected today in the productive habits of occasional underdeveloped peoples, are: the communal ownership and use of the productive means of subsistence, both technical and natural; extremely primitive tools and, correspondingly, poor skills and low degree of productive power of labour; production for the direct purposes of consumption and the corresponding communal division of the total results of production amongst the actual producers themselves; a simple social organization based on kinship relations rather than on castes or classes, and absence of the exploitation of any group in the community by any other group; and finally, the absence of a state.²¹⁷

The other three generic types of historical production, ancient, feudal, and modern bourgeois, share in common — thus differing from the primitive type — : private ownership and use of the productive means of subsistence; more highly developed instruments and skills and hence a greater productive power of labour; production for other than the direct purposes of consumption and hence private rather than communal distribution (in which the non-producers often share most heavily); the exploitation of some groups in the community by others; the general organization of society into economic and social classes sanctioned by a state, and the constant struggle between these classes. Alike in these ways, the ancient, feudal, and modern systems of production differ from one another primarily in respect of, 1 —

²¹⁵ Cf. Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 357.

²¹⁶ Cf. *Origin of the Family*, *passim*.

²¹⁷ Cf. *Origin of the Family*, for example Chapters III and IX.

differences in the degree of development of tools or technics, and correspondingly in skills and total productive power, and, 2 - differences in the character of their social organization in terms of the ownership of the forces and means of production.

The ancient or slave system of production, for example, has at its disposal iron instead of stone instruments, and the skills thus demanded of it and its consequent powers over nature are correspondingly augmented over the communal type. It can till the soil on a large scale for its vegetable food, and level forests for pasturage for its animal sustenance; agriculture and cattle raising have been added to hunting. With the increase in productive power has come, on the other hand, the possibility of the private appropriation of surpluses for use in exchange, and the corresponding power of buying privately the means of production and controlling the labour power of others. Characteristic of this system of production, then, is that total ownership of all components of the productive organism resides in the hands of a minority: the slave owner privately owns not only the objective elements of production, that is, natural resources and tools, but the subjective factor as well; his is the power to buy, sell, use or destroy the worker as though the latter were a tool, a tree, an ox, or a plot of land.

In the feudal system, ownership of the means of production is differently distributed. Absolute ownership of the objective factor, the land, is vested in the feudal lord, but his title to the subjective factor, the worker, is not absolute. The lord owns him merely by title to a share of his labour, which he may dispose of as he sees fit. In return, however, he is obligated to grant the worker actual possession, that is, relative ownership, of land, absolute ownership of certain tools, and the right to appropriate to his own use at least some of the products of his own labour, both agricultural and handicraft. This social organization is a direct function of increased technological competence. Increased productive powers demand, for their full exploitation, a certain amount of personal initiative on the part of the worker, an interest which the slave, with no private stake in the productive

enterprise, did not have. Slavery has given way to serfdom. But here no less than in antiquity the majority is exploited by the minority. The slave commanded none of the products of his own labour but was fed and clothed by his owner. The serf appropriates enough for himself to keep alive but the rest of what he and his fellow serfs produce is appropriated by the lord, a non-producer.

Under the modern bourgeois system of production, the objective, but not the subjective, elements of production are owned by the dominant minority, and technique has reached a high degree of excellence, with a corresponding enormous increase in the productive power of labour. The capitalist owns the vast majority of the means of production, both natural resources and machines, but the worker owns himself and his own labour power. Slavery and serfdom have given way to freedom. But the acquisition of freedom from ownership by others does not bring the worker freedom from exploitation, or the society freedom from class conflict. "The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society," proclaims *The Communist Manifesto*, "has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones."²¹⁸ The free worker, while legally sharing the capitalist's freedom to produce and to appropriate to himself the products of his own production for use or sale, has in fact no means of production at his command: both raw materials and the instruments for making products out of them are owned by the capitalist. To live, then, to acquire the products necessary for the maintenance of himself and his family, since he owns no means of producing them himself, he is forced to sell to the capitalist the only thing he does own, his own labour power. He remains the actual producer in that it is his labour which fashions the product, but it is the capitalist who, by virtue of his ownership of the means of production, appropriates the product, paying the worker a wage that is sufficient to provide his bare necessities but is much below the value of that which he has produced. The surplus value remains the

private property of the capitalist, as it did, in the other systems, of the feudal lord and slave holder.

The fifth generic type of productive system which Marx and Engels distinguished was an anticipation of the future rather than a record of the past; the socialist system had not yet made historical appearance at the time of their deaths. It would be characterized, they believed, by common rather than private ownership of the means of production, by production for needs rather than for profits, by the social appropriation of the products of labour, and their distribution at first on the basis of the social value of the labour performed by the individual worker, and, eventually, when unfettered technological advance had brought about an economy of abundance, merely on the basis of his needs. The possibility of exploitation would here be abolished, and with it, eventually, the *raison d'être* of the state.

These, then, the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal, the capitalist and the socialist, were the five generic types of productive system which Marx and Engels distinguished. They were more than generic types; they were also stages in the historical development of productive systems, "so many epochs in the progress of the economic formation of society."²¹⁹ They were stages the first three of which Marx and Engels believed all Western European nations by then involved in the capitalistic fourth, had previously, in one form or another, passed through, and the fifth, to which they and other countries would eventually arrive. But there was obviously no "eternal necessity" in this particular pattern of economic evolution. For Marx and Engels it represented no rigid order which, by some a priori economic dialectic, all countries must inevitably follow, but rather an historical description of how western economy had actually developed. Marx, who himself refers to it merely as "my historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe," explicitly repudiates any formalistic interpretation of it, any "metamorphosis" of it "into an historico-philosophic theory of the *marche générale* imposed by fate upon every people, whatever the historic circum-

²¹⁹ Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Preface; *Op. Cit.*, p. 357.

stances in which it finds itself, in order that it may ultimately arrive at the form of economy which will insure, together with the greatest expansion of the productive powers of social labour, the most complete development of man.”²²⁰ Both he and Engels frequently entertain new hopes for exceptions to the sequence amongst the countries of their day, considering carefully each historical circumstance which seemed to promote the possibility of escape from it. They even believed that some of its stages might be avoided entirely, and it is interesting, in the light of subsequent developments, to note that Russia was one of the countries to which they gave particular attention in this connection. When Engels, in a letter to Danielson, explains why such a deviation from historical pattern could not have been hoped for in the Russia of 1854, his argument rests not on the sanctity of the pattern, but on the concrete circumstances which tended then, unfortunately, to reinforce it. “Such an evolution,” he says, “which would have surpassed anything known in history, required other economical, political and intellectual conditions than were present at that time in Russia,” and he proceeds to explain in considerable detail what these conditions were.²²¹ By 1877, Marx believes that Russia has already been faced with “one of the finest chances ever offered by history to a nation” to avoid entirely “the fatal vicissitudes of the capitalist regime”²²² and five years later, in the Preface to the Russian edition of *The Communist Manifesto*, Engels, asking specifically whether the Russian *obshchina*, the simple peasant community, could not make direct revolutionary transition from its primitive communism, “to the higher form of communist ownership,” without first passing through “the same process of dissolution such as constitutes the historical evolution of the West,” states specifically the necessary political conditions in Europe at large under which Russia herself might avoid the intermediate stages.²²³

²²⁰ Letter to the Editor of *Otyecstvenniye Zapisky*, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 354.

²²¹ *Selected Correspondence*, p. 508 f.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 353.

²²³ *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 192. He considers the question still further, and in greater detail, a decade later in a letter to Danielson. See *Selected Correspondence*, p. 513 ff.

What is of primary interest to us in connection with the problem of the change in human nature, is the manner in which, according to Marx and Engels, the various regimes of historical production have developed and supplanted one another. The ultimate cause of change in human nature must be sought in the ultimate cause of the historical transformations of productive systems. The balance of factors which has been responsible for the historical growth and development of different systems of production has varied a great deal from case to case as we have seen, and little can be generalized concerning the local causal action. In every case, however, Marx and Engels believed, a point has eventually been reached where certain subjective factors and certain objective factors have come into conflict — conflict so irreconcilable that the only possible outcome is the total destruction of the system itself and its replacement by a new one. Prior to this time, they point out, the two sets of factors, though in dialectical opposition when viewed as individual components of the productive organism,²²⁴ have constituted an organic unity operating toward the maximum development and fruitfulness of the available productive forces. "No social order ever disappears," says Marx, "before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have been developed. . . ." ²²⁵ After this point has been reached, however, the opposition has ceased to be constructive, the conflict has become ever more acute and has finally eventuated in the revolutionary rupture of the system itself, and with it the transformation of everything that had rested on it — laws, political forms, mores, beliefs, philosophies, art forms, in short, the actual behaviour of men and hence, human nature itself. "At a certain stage of their development," says Marx in a famous summary passage, "the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or — what is but a legal expression for the same thing — with the property relations within which they have been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins

²²⁴ See, for example, above, p. 86 f.

²²⁵ Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 356-7.

an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed." ²²⁶

Let us look at this carefully. We are told in effect that the expanding productive potential of any system sooner or later becomes checked by certain laggard and restrictive elements in it, and that it overcomes these elements in sudden and revolutionary fashion. This implies that some of the elements — those which Marx calls the productive forces — develop more rapidly than do others — those which he refers to as the productive relations. Or, what amounts dialectically to the same thing, that in respect to each other, the forces of production represent dynamic and progressive elements, while the relations of production are static or even reactionary in their relative movement.

What, precisely, are these "productive forces," and what are "productive relations"? At no place that I have been able to discover do Marx and Engels explicitly define productive forces. And an examination of the various contexts in which the term is employed leads only to the conclusion that it refers not to any specific group of the elements which constitute the mode of production, but to all of those elements viewed severally — *so long as the system in question is in a stage of expanding or progressive development*, that is, before the point of deleterious conflict has been reached. Thus *The Manifesto* identifies as contemporary productive forces, among others, such diverse constituents of the bourgeois capitalist mode of production as "subjection of nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalization of rivers," etc. ²²⁷ — in short, elements which fall under the three categories of purposive labour, natural resources, and instruments. And elsewhere, again and again, as, for example, in the case of division of labour, elements subsumable under the social category are included amongst the productive forces. From this it would appear that even the relations of production, which, after the de-

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 356; cf. (I, 6, 179) *Poverty of Philosophy*, International Publishers, New York (no date), pp. 92, 157, and *Selected Correspondence*, p. 12.

²²⁷ (I, 6, 530) *Op. Cit.*, p. 210.

cline of the system sets in, stand in dialectical opposition to the forces of production in a destructive way, may, prior to that time, be themselves considered productive forces. Capitalist property relations, for example, which, according to Marx and Engels, currently act as fetters to the development of western economy, and against which the whole of Marxism is drawn up to do battle unto the death, constituted formerly — that is, during the positive or expanding phase of capitalism following the collapse of feudalism, progressive forces of production, forces that were necessary to bring to full fruition the technique, skill, and natural resource potentials of the modern system. Hence I do not think we can, within the proper meaning of Marxism, identify the “forces of production” with any one, or with any combination, of the four elements revealed in the anatomy of production. Here again the situation is dialectical, not mechanical. In the youthful period of a system all the elements of the mode of production — the human, the social, the natural, and the technical — are also forces of production; in its old age some of these same elements cease to be forces of production.²²⁸

The term “forces of production,” then, takes on a different meaning after the high noon of a productive system from what it had before, for certain of the original elements are now excluded. Skills are still forces of production; human needs, human purposive activities, even certain phases of the social organization of production, for example, the specialization of function and the co-operative character of the work within an industrial establishment — all these remain forces of production. So do technical and natural resources, for these, like the human resources, are, according to Marx and Engels, capable, if given the opportunity, of almost limitless development and expansion. What then is it which is excluded? What are the elements of production which have ceased to be forces of production?

This is one of the relatively few questions that one can ask of historical materialism without being admonished to turn for the answer to an investigation of the specific system which is of interest. Here Marx and Engels felt able to make a generalization

²²⁸ Cf. Marx's comment on division of labour, *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 400.

from past systems and to incorporate it into their law of historical movement. In every case it is certain relations of production that cease to be forces of production. When this occurs, they do not wither away, disappear or abdicate, but set themselves up in obstructive opposition to the otherwise expansive forces of production, and cause a conflict that can only eventuate in their own annihilation.

What, then, are these "relations of production"? Marx and Engels use the term in a variety of ways. Trade unions and trusts are obviously relations of production; so are guild organizations, assembly lines, collective farms and sharecropping. In a general sense any organization whatsoever of the human element in the labour process is a relation of production, and many of these relations may remain productive forces to the bitter end. As Marx makes clear in the passage quoted from the *Critique of Political Economy*, however, the particular relations of production which cease to be forces of production and which he and Engels see tangling so catastrophically with their former associates, are simply the property relations, or the system of ownership that obtains in the regime in question. This, of course, is to be understood primarily in terms of the ownership of the *forces* of production, for all commodity ownership, that is, property in such *results* of production as a toothbrush, a house, a potato, or a suit of clothes, derives ultimately, they believe, from property in labour, technics and natural resources.

It is the property or ownership relations obtaining within a system of production, then, which sooner or later clash with the forces of production that they themselves were instrumental in unleashing. The thought is somewhat Frankensteinian in reverse: the creator becomes the monster and is destroyed by his worthy creation. For, according to Marx and Engels, he is inevitably destroyed: the forces of production are inevitably more powerful than the restrictive property relations. The latter is an integument that must be burst asunder so that the former may grow and fructify, and it is burst asunder.²²⁹

Concretely, in terms, for example, of our own society, what

does this mean? What, specifically are present productive forces, and how do they stand in conflict with the present system of property ownership? A large part of *Capital*, and probably at least a third of the total Marx-Engels literary output are devoted to exhibiting precisely this. But though the general point is central to the present study of human nature, the analytic exploitation of instances is marginal, and we shall have to be content with the minimum illustrative statement that is compatible with clarity of exposition. In Chapter III of *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*,²³⁰ Engels offers a brief, clear and concrete account of the theory in terms of the western feudalism-capitalism-socialism historical transition. Here he expresses today's conflict as chiefly one of the essential incompatibility between social production and private or capitalist appropriation.²³¹ By the social character of modern production, Engels refers to the obvious fact that the instruments of modern industry and their operators, the workers, are gathered together in large concentrations in the great industrial establishments, and division of labour has reached a high stage of development; production is no longer individualistic as in the days of the artisan, who turned out complete products in his home, atelier, or cave; no one man is responsible for the completion of a whole product from raw material to usable object or marketable commodity, but shares responsibility for it with the hundreds or thousands of others who are co-operatively engaged in the productive enterprise, whether they be polishers, greasers, operatives, engineers, draughtsmen, designers, janitors, inspectors, watchmen, or detail workers on the assembly line. No one man can say of any one toothbrush, automobile, sweater, or sheet of facial tissue, this is *my* product, this is what *my* labour has fashioned out of the natural *Gegenstand* for human use. With the artisan or the primitive maker of arrowheads the situation was clearly different: Cellini could take his own gold, fashion it into a chalice, and either keep it himself for private drinking or sell it for more gold for the production of other chalices; the

²³⁰ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 276 ff) *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 165 ff, or *Anti-Dühring*, p. 292 ff. For a more elaborate account, see Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Parts IV and VII.

²³¹ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 280) *Op. Cit.*, p. 169.

savage can pick up a stone, hew it into a weapon, and use it directly on deer or trade it for venison. But if the modern worker appropriates to himself so much as a sheet of facial tissue, he is liable before the law. And this, according to Engels, is altogether proper. For production is no longer individual, but social.²³² Appropriation should therefore be social, not individual.

Where, then, is the contradiction in the modern system? Simply, according to Engels, in this fact, that modern appropriation, as a matter of fact and nevertheless, is not social but individual and private. And furthermore, that the individuals who privately appropriate the products of social labour are individuals who often stand wholly outside of the social labour process. Their hands may not have touched the product in any of its stages. They may not even have exerted the actual labour requisite to the physical appropriation of the products of the assembly line—the driving away of the car, the carrying to the drug stores and other distribution centers, or even to their own medicine chests, of the boxes of facial tissue; they may even, by virtue of inherited stock certificates, bask permanently in Riviera sands or alcoholic bliss while others carry out not only the total tasks of production, but even the actual labours involved in appropriating to them the endless stream of commodities.

This is a situation which historical materialism ascribes not to the malice of modern men, but simply to the current system of property relations. "The persons of capitalists and landlords," admits Marx in the preface to the first edition of *Capital*, "are not depicted in rose tinted colors. But I here speak of individuals only insofar as they are personifications of economic categories, representatives of special class relations and class interests. Since I understand the development of the economic structure of society to be a natural process, I should be the last to hold the individual responsible for conditions whose creature he himself is,

²³² The individualistic character of more primitive forms of production is not to be taken as inconsistent with the historical materialist dictum that all production is social. To be sure, since man is a social animal, all production whatever is social. The differences between mediaeval craft industry and modern machine industry is the difference between individual and social production in the relative, not in the absolute sense.

socially speaking, however much he may raise himself above them subjectively.”²⁸³ Who, in other words, is to blame the Riviera basker for not exchanging the tender ministrations of the southern sun for the searing fires which sweat the sinews of the steel puddler?

Appropriation in the modern system, then, is private — that is to say, modern appropriation, or ownership relations, are, according to Engels, congruous not with the modern system of social production, but with the system of an earlier epoch, where production too was private. Engels’ account of the demise of this earlier system illustrates again the historical materialist law of social movement. As long as the means of production were owned by their individual users, appropriation could properly remain private; but at the same time the means of production themselves, limited and scattered as they were, were bound to remain puny, dwarfish, restricted. In other words, their potential of development was frustrated by the ownership system obtaining — by the very fact of their individual ownership. To become enlarged, to become transformed into the mighty levers of production of the present day, they needed to burst these bonds, to come under a new system of ownership which allowed for their concentration and development. This was accomplished by the bourgeois revolution and the capitalist system. The new relations of production substituted a highly concentrated for a highly diversified ownership of the forces of production, thus helping them to ripen and mature, and themselves constituting at this time genuine forces of production.²⁸⁴ But now the development has ceased; the inevitable impasse has been again reached; the relations of production are no longer forces of production but fetters on these forces. The latter’s development is inhibited not by the possibilities of production but by the possibilities of current profit to their owners. The motor manufacturer with a huge financial stake in a gasoline engine plant, and the petroleum producer, are not going to encourage the development of techniques that might, for example, make *water* a fuel source for combus-

²⁸³ Vol. I, p. 15.

²⁸⁴ *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, Op. Cit.*, p. 166. For Marx’s highly detailed account see *Capital*, Vol. I, Part IV.

tion engines. Yet this is both a technical possibility and a natural desideratum. The ownership relations inhibiting this and endless other technical possibilities must be destroyed. Socialism must come with new ownership relations — relations appropriate to modern socialized production — socialized ownership. And this will happen. The forces of production always have broken through, and presumably will continue to break through and shatter the restrictive relations of production and emerge to a new level of development. In verification we need only compare the tractor-combine with the ox-drawn plow, the radio with the blanket which made smoke signals. This is the Marxian picture.

The foregoing account leaves one major question to be answered, and one that is often wrongly answered — the question of how, specifically, as Marx and Engels see it, this revolutionary overthrow of productive systems is accomplished. That it is not accomplished by the dialectic may be said at once. The dialectic, notwithstanding the faith of certain of its devotees or the ridicule of its detractors, was never expected by Marx and Engels to take over and publicly operate bourgeois factories any more than it confiscated *in nomine populi* feudal landholdings. For this chore people are responsible, as they were for the breaking up of the estates. Nor is obedience to dialectical fiat their motive in doing this. The dialectic has nothing whatever to do with the matter. The dialectic for Marx and Engels is not a thing, but merely the formal structure of actual processes, both social and natural. The agent for the process of social revolution is, according to them, the subjective or human element in production — namely men, workers, and the motive is simply human need. If the collective dictates of individual human needs bring about results that are consonant with dialectical principles and Marxian predictions, so much the sounder Marxism and dialectics. But the result is not the cause. If the revolutionary rupture of restrictive property relations liberates the forces of production along with the human beings who have been oppressed by them, so much the better for these forces, but it was the humanly intolerable state of the oppressed classes, not their abstract desire to remove a dialectical

impasse from the current economy, that was the primary cause. That this does not argue for Marx and Engels the inconsequentiality of theoretical understanding and conscious planning of history, or of the factor of intelligence in social action, especially at the present stage of historical development, will be abundantly evident, I believe, from the final chapter. The point here is that there have already been revolutions in systems of production, that these revolutions exhibited a dialectical character, yet were accomplished by men who had knowledge neither of Marxism nor of dialectics.

It is men, then, and not dialectical travails, that bring about revolutions, that shatter outworn property relations and replace them by new ones, that are, in short, the makers of history and hence the makers of human nature. And so, for the most part, Marx and Engels express their theory of the dynamic element in history not in terms of the dialectical contradiction between the expansive forces of production and their restrictive relations, but in terms of class conflict: "The history of all hitherto existing society," begins *The Communist Manifesto*,²⁸⁵ "is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes." Here, then, is the dynamic element in history — classes of men driven by incompatibility of interests to the endless struggles which form the "series of evolutions" which *is* history.²⁸⁶

And here at last we are in a position to begin drawing together the various threads of this study, for we have returned again to the heart of the causal concept in the Marxian theory of human nature. It has been shown that for Marx and Engels the chief and most basic agent for the determination of what men are is the character of their productive activities, or the way in which they make their living. It was pointed out that since the dissolu-

²⁸⁵ (I 6, 525-6) *Op. Cit.*, pp. 204-5.

²⁸⁶ Cf. Engels, Prefaces to *The Manifesto*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 193, 202.

tion of the primitive gens, the way in which men have made their living, that is, the specific *division* of human labour, or at least the crystallization of it, that has occurred within any productive regime, has been ultimately determined by the class structure that was operative in connection with it. We are now told that it is classes which, by virtue of their uncompromising struggles, have been the human agents for the changes in productive systems, and hence for the changes in human nature. What sense, precisely, does this make? What are classes? What is the source of the history-making struggle between them? How, specifically, have they determined and changed human nature?

On page one thousand and thirty one of the last volume of *Capital*, Marx begins what was obviously intended to be his definitive analysis of classes, but unfortunately he was able to complete only three paragraphs, and the work ends at that point. As much as this fact is to be regretted, it can scarcely be said to deprive us of possible understanding of his meaning, for the class theme is apparent in one form or another in most of his and Engels' writing, and there are frequent rather minutely detailed discussions of it.²⁸⁷ In essence the theory seems to be this: Classes conflict with one another for the very reason that they are classes; basic incompatibility of interest is a part of their definition. For classes are ultimately simply the distinctions that may be made amongst groups of men on the basis of their position in society in terms of the relations of production. And since relations of production are, as previously shown, definable in terms of ownership of the forces of production, the class to which any man belongs may be discovered — if indeed it is not directly evident in his appearance, speech, behaviour, etc. — by determining what forces of production he owns relative to the general distribution of ownership within the system. There is an obvious corollary to this: since private ownership of the forces of production makes possible the exploitation of the labour power of non-owners, and, for their part, frees the owners from such exploitation by others,

²⁸⁷ Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (*Selected Works*, Vol. II), for example, is useful as a particularly subtle and rather elaborate dissection of the bourgeoisie as a class.

another way of determining a man's class is to discover to what extent he is free to exploit and free from being exploited. In general, then, freedom from exploitation as well as property in the forces of production is a mark of class difference.

In the gentile, or primitive communist society, for example, there was, according to Marx and Engels, no private ownership of the forces of production; land and natural resources, the labour of individuals, and whatever primitive instruments there were, were, in the last analysis, properties of the community as a whole. Since no group of individuals within the community owned productive forces to the exclusion of other groups, since all individuals shared in the ownership of everything,²⁸⁸ no group was free to exploit the labour of others and all individuals were free from exploitation. There is no room here for classes in the Marxian sense. In the ancient system, on the other hand, the worker not only owned nothing but he shared in the ownership of nothing, not even his own labour, his person, or his life. Not only, therefore, was he unfree to exploit others, but he was unfree from exploitation by others. He was totally propertyless, totally unfree. He belonged to the slave class. His owner, however, owned not only him, the natural resources on which he was put to work, and the tools with which he worked them, but also, and consequently, totally owned himself. He was totally propertied in the forces of production, totally free. He belonged to the patrician class.²⁸⁹ In the feudal system the country lord owned the source

²⁸⁸ Marx and Engels are not talking about *personal* property in the sense of houses, loin cloths, beard combs, etc., but of *private* property in land, technical and labour resources.

²⁸⁹ For economy of space, and for purposes of avoiding duplication of critical material that is already widely available to the student of historical materialism, I am over-simplifying the account here and in what follows. Since our chief concern is with the Marxian theory of the influence of classes on human nature and not with the Marxian theory of classes as such, an exhaustive analysis of class differentiation would not be to the point. However, the impression should not be left that Marxism propounds a simple mechanical dualism of classes within each historical epoch. Very much on the contrary, such a handy thing to deal with begins to occur only in the later, or degenerative phases of the most modern epoch, where, according to Marx and Engels, bourgeoisie v. proletariat tend more and more to become the order of the day. Earlier systems, and earlier periods within the present system produced a plethora of classes. Even in the simplified passage quoted from *The Manifesto*, Marx and Engels designate four classes each in both the ancient and feudal systems: "freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian," "lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman," and in their more detailed expositions they always distinguish, even in the early capitalist period, at least four classes — five if one includes the peasants — landowners, capitalists,

of all agricultural production, the land, and many of the tools; the urban guild-master owned the majority of the means of handicraft production, workshop, raw materials, and tools. The country worker owned some tools and part title to his own labour, but nothing to use them on; the town worker, some tools and his own labour but no raw materials and hence no opportunity for developing his skills or making his living. The first two were crucial property owners, the second not; the first were free from exploitation and free to exploit, the second not. According to the standards of ownership and freedom, the classes were: Landlord and serf, guild-master and journeyman. In the modern system of large scale industry, the capitalist owns the sources of raw materials and the plant, that is, buildings and machinery — but only the labour that he can buy. The worker owns his own labour but since he owns nothing to use it on, he is forced to sell it to the capitalist for a wage that will keep him alive, leaving himself *de facto* owner of nothing except his person and his life — not (directly) forces of production. Freedom, following ownership, is here unilateral, and class lines are drawn between bourgeoisie and proletariat. Finally, in the anticipated socialist system, ownership relations and consequent distribution of freedoms are essentially those of the gentile system — all forces of production are socially owned, that which is socially produced is socially distributed, no group is free to exploit, freedom from exploitation is universal. There are no classes.

These, then, are what classes are, in the Marxian view. And the source of their history-making conflict is evident from this view of them: opposing classes within any society engage in a finish

middle-class, and proletarians. In such historical writings as *The Class Struggles in France*, *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, and *Germany: Revolution and Counter Revolution* (For which see Volume II of *Selected Works*) they dig, up certainly no less than a dozen classes in various countries and at various times within the earlier modern period (Cf. also Part III of *The Manifesto*), and anyone who has a sound historical knowledge of previous epochs might distinguish in them, on the basis of the two standards mentioned, a somewhat similar pluralism of classes. The Marxian argument that a multiplicity of class distinctions has finally currently simplified itself into the single distinction of bourgeoisie-proletariat is epitomized in the assertion of *The Communist Manifesto* that our present epoch "possesses this distinctive feature: It has simplified the class antagonisms. Society is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other — bourgeoisie and proletariat" (I, 6, 526) (*Op. Cit.*, pp. 205-6). Here our purpose is merely to communicate the general significance of the class theory, not to exhaust its details.

fight because their respective members stand in a relationship which, as regards ownership control over the productive resources, and hence, assurance of the basic material requirements of existence itself, is mutually exclusive. This is why, in the Marxian view, non-owners engage today in such activities as, for example, trade union organization and politics, in order to force for themselves a share in the control of their community's productive resources from which their non-ownership legally excludes them. And this is why, in the Marxian view, such activities are bitterly opposed by owners. This today is class struggle. And class struggle in the past has always eventually culminated, according to Marx and Engels, in revolution, in which existing ownership relations were destroyed and replaced by new ones.

How, now, do classes determine and change human nature? This involves, finally, the whole question of whether historical materialism represents an occupational or a class theory of human nature. The answer is, it represents both. The general causal lines of the theory may be drawn roughly as follows: What an individual who comes into life with a certain biological inheritance eventually turns out to be by way of a man, depends on what he does to his environment during the course of his development, and on what it does to him. What he is, therefore, will depend on what kind of an environment he has to deal with and the manner in which he deals with it.

His environment, in its "natural" aspect, is set partly by geography, but of more immediate importance, except in pioneering periods, by what men before him and their societies have done to it — for example, built cities, devastated it with shells, brought water into it or drained water off. In its "social" aspect it is set by what his ancestors have done collectively to nature and to each other, and it to them, that is, by history. Since history for Marx and Engels "is the history of class struggles," it is thus classes, according to the argument, which are ultimately responsible for the social environment in which any individual subsequent to the gentile period finds himself.

The manner in which a man deals with his environment, on the other hand, is set partly by its acquired character, but more

immediately importantly by his needs, that is, by what he wants to get out of the environment. What most men want primarily, as a precondition of all other wanting, is the possibility of staying alive — that is, food, shelter, and so on. Since the satisfaction of this basic want and its bare marginal accoutrements occupies the greater part of the waking life of most men, and since, in any event, their non-vocational wants and satisfactions — educational, sportive, cultural, artistic, entertainment, travel, etc. — depend on the time and opportunities that vocational activities afford and the use they are vocationally conditioned to make of them, it may be said that the manner in which a man deals with his environment is the same, insofar as it makes him one kind of a man rather than another, as the manner in which he makes his living. The specific determinant here is obviously occupation.

When we ask, however, what determines in fact the way in which an individual makes his living, we are given ultimately a “class” answer. In a hypothetical “state of nature,” Marx and Engels think, the particular occupation a man engages in would precipitate from, on the one hand, his native biological endowments (*e.g.*, keenness of eye, strength of arms, length of legs, nimbleness of fingers, etc.) and, on the other, from the character of the primitive environment. In actual fact, however, it is determined primarily by, first, the productive enterprises that his society happens to make available to would-be livelihood earners, that is, by the current mode of production, and, second, by the particular occupational role his society assigns him within these enterprises, that is, by the specific division of labour obtaining within that mode of production.

Now the mode of production, as has been shown, is determined, according to Marx and Engels, by four factors, labour, nature, tools, and society, and its local determinism is not a matter for generalization. But whatever its microcosmic causality, its macrocosmic causality is the same as in all other modes of production with the exception of the gentile: it was ushered in by class-conflict, and, save for the socialist mode, in which there will be no classes, is bound to be so ushered out. So, in this macrocosmic sense, what the individual is, as this derives from how he

makes his living, and this from the mode of production which constitutes his social environment, is also, in the Marxian view, ultimately determined by classes.

The class answer would be more immediate and direct in the case of the division of labour. Although it is precisely the division of labour that prescribes for the individual the nature of his employment, and hence, specifically, the kind of man that he will turn out to be — and the specific etiology of this is important enough to the present study to claim the whole of the next chapter — it is nevertheless ultimately class interests which either establish the division of labour itself, or, once it has been established, crystallize and perpetuate it. It is this detail of the Marxian theory that must be shown by way of concluding the general argument.

Marx and Engels distinguish two kinds of division of labour, the “social division” and the “manufacturing division.”²⁴⁰ The first is a “natural” development, the second is “planned.” Insofar as both distribute occupations, they both have their effect on men. Their respective relations to classes, however, differ. The social division of labour is equivalent, roughly speaking, to the differentiation of trades which, according to Marx, grows up “naturally” in all historical communities, at first on the basis of mere physiological differences such as age and sex, later according to skills, the availability of natural resources, and, particularly, the possibilities of exchange.²⁴¹ Thus the differences between the primitive occupations of men and women, the one hunting, fighting, fishing, the other cooking, weaving, sewing, childbearing, is a social division of labour,²⁴² as are, subsequently, the divisions between agriculture, industry, trading, and between the vocations, within these larger divisions, of cattle-breeder, planter, smith, carpenter, potter, spinner, weaver, tailor, tanner, cobbler and so on.²⁴³ It is obvious that, genetically speak-

²⁴⁰ *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 385-95, 373, 374, 531-2; (I, 6, 197, 200, 201, 204-5) *Poverty of Philosophy*, pp. 113, 116, 117, 121; (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 278-9) *Ann-Duhring*, p. 294; Engels to Conrad Schmidt, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 480; cf., *Origin of the Family*, Chapter IX.

²⁴¹ *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 373, 386, 389, 392-4, 531-2; (I, 6, 200-1) *Poverty of Philosophy*, pp. 116-17; Engels, *Origin of the Family*, p. 192 ff.

²⁴² *Origin of the Family*, pp. 192-3; *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 386.

²⁴³ *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 386, 389, 392-3, et al.

ing, there is no class determination here. Indeed, the causality is the reverse, if anything. In at least one place Engels explicitly derives the origin of classes within the primitive commune from the social or "natural" division of labour.²⁴⁴ However this may be, it still remains an historical fact, according to Marx and Engels, that classes take over the social division of labour, once it and they have been established, shaping it to their own interests and uses, thus crystallizing and perpetuating it in one form rather than another. Guilds, castes, and "mysteries" are instances in point. They ossify occupations, petrify them, make them hereditary, exclude from them all but "initiates."²⁴⁵ Thus it is that classes, by making use of the social or natural division of labour have been able in all of post-gentile history to put their brand on the human nature of their members.

As to the manufacturing or planned division of labour, it is not only class dominated but class created. It comes into very being by capitalist fiat and is controlled at every step by capitalist interests. The manufacturing entrepreneur consciously and deliberately isolates and renders independent the various operations requisite to the production of a given commodity; he then separates, classifies and groups the workers in accordance with their predominant qualities and assigns to each a detail task, which, since he becomes proficient in it by its performance, is apt to become his for a lifetime.²⁴⁶ Now it is obvious that if the kind of work that a man performs throughout his life in any way determines the kind of human nature that he shall develop, then here classes are most directly determinative of human nature.

That this is truly a class-determinism, Marx argues in the following words: "If, to begin with, the worker sells his labour power to capital because he himself lacks the material means for producing a commodity, now his individual labour power actually refuses its services unless it is sold to capital. It can only function in an environment which comes into existence in the capitalist's workshop after the sale of labour power has taken

²⁴⁴ *Origin of the Family*, Chapter IX, especially p. 195, cf. p. 212.

²⁴⁵ *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 373, 393-4, 531-2. Cf. Marx to Annenkov, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 9, also (III, 4, 581) Engels to Marx, *Ibid.*, p. 407.

²⁴⁶ *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 383-4.

place. Rendered naturally unable to make anything independently, the manufacturing worker can only develop productive activity as a mere appendage of the capitalist's workshop. Just as it was written on the brow of the chosen people that they were Jehovah's property, so does the division of labour brand the manufacturing worker as the property of capital."²⁴⁷

To summarize, then, the historical materialist argument: It is classes which, through the action of past societies of men on the primitive *Gegenstand*, determine in considerable measure the character of the natural environment into which an individual is born. It is classes which set the pattern of his social environment. It is classes which, by assigning him a specific role in the division of labour, determine the manner in which he will deal with that environment. It is classes which, in their revolutionary struggles, overthrow productive systems, transform ownership relations, establish new classes, new divisions of labour, and thus *change* human nature. Thus it is that if one excludes the biological factor from consideration — and the human beings of the gentile epoch — one may say with perfect faithfulness to the full meaning of historical materialism, that it is classes which have *made* human nature. It is they, according to Marx and Engels, that have stamped on men the various particular traits and behaviour patterns which they have exhibited in all of post-gentile history. It is they, ultimately that have changed human nature so radically in the course of historical development that, in the Marxian view, as little remains today of man's "original nature" as remains, for example, of the hair that characterized the hide of his tree-climbing progenitor. This is the meaning of the Marxian assertion that the nature of an individual is ultimately determined by the position that he occupies in the social relations of production, that is, by his class. This is the meaning of the assertion that what human nature becomes, or, alternatively, *change* in human nature, is determined in the long run by what new social relations, new classes, the conflict of classes produces. This, then, is the full meaning of that famous summary passage in Marx's sixth thesis on Feuerbach: "The human

essence is no abstraction inherent in each separate individual; in its reality it is the *ensemble* of the social relations.”

So much for the role of classes in the determination of human nature. In order now that nothing may be left to conjecture regarding the historical materialist theory of the causes of human development, the specific action of division of labour in the process should be traced concretely and in detail. This will be the business of the next section.

CHAPTER IX

Suffering II: Division of Labour

IF THERE WERE any comprehensive, yet systematic and detailed exposition in the writings of Marx and Engels, of how the human natures of history have come to be what they are, this study would have no *raison d'être*. In the last analysis, however, Marx and Engels were admittedly less interested in interpreting the men that have made mankind than they were in changing the men that make the modern working class. To know how to effect this change, however, they had to learn in detail how the "human nature" of the working class was actually created, and from their specific discoveries, an idea can be generalized of their eventual theory of the way in which "human natures" at large are determined.

We have seen in the previous chapter how classes determine the particular division of labour that shall be in force during any given epoch and, through this division of labour, the character of the human beings of that epoch. It now remains for us to try to uncover the specific manner in which division of labour operates in the fashioning of men, or in other words, how, specifically, the "human nature" of individuals is actually shaped by their ordinary employment.

Since Marx and Engels were always at their most eloquent when in outrage, and since, of the many evils of the capitalist system, that which outraged them perhaps most was the deleterious effect on human beings of the highly developed division of labour therein in force,²⁴⁸ their most communicative passages are apt to be objurgatory rather than merely descriptive, and to focus on a relatively narrow and not unduly attractive aspect of the etiology of human nature. Moreover, the objective conditions of employment of most working people of their day were probably the worst that capitalism has ever produced, and these were the conditions which they found at hand for study. While it could

²⁴⁸ See *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1936, Chapters V-X; *Capital*, Vol. I, Chapter XIV, Sections 4 and 5, and Chapter XV, Sections 3, 4, 5, 8 and 9.

doubtless be shown that few of the horrors they record have subsequently been wholly overcome,²⁴⁹ it seems evident enough that, thanks partly to the power of the Marxian protest and program itself, they have been materially curtailed in extent and magnitude during the intervening century, and today Marx and Engels would trace the fashioning of somewhat different "natures" by somewhat different circumstances of employment. Our concern, then, will be not with their just indignation over nineteenth-century capitalistic abuses, but merely with discovering as objectively as possible from their consideration of those abuses, what they conceived to be the exact role of division of labour in the occupational shaping of human nature.

Marx and Engels express their general quarrel with division of labour in at least five different ways: first, division of labour has artificially separated the interests of the individual from those of the community as a whole — that is, from "the communal interests of all individuals who have intercourse with one another;"²⁵⁰ second, it has made brutalizing separations in the labour process, such, for example, as that of intellectual from material activities, of enjoyment from work, of production from consumption, etc.;²⁵¹ third, it has transformed personal powers into material powers,²⁵² or, as Marx and Engels phrase the same thought in a different context, it has resolved "personal worth into exchange value;"²⁵³ fourth, it has given to social relationships an existence independent of man, whereby his "own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him;"²⁵⁴ and finally, by forcing men into a specialization of function that becomes more and more

²⁴⁹ In a recent year, for example, according to a Presidential report, the first cause of all deaths of American males between the ages of 21 and 44, was accident in employment. The overall casualty rate in industrial accidents was eleven killed and forty permanent, disabled every hour. (*New York Times*, Saturday, March 21, 1942, p. 18.)

²⁵⁰ (I, 5, 22 f) *The German Ideology*, pp. 22, 23.

²⁵¹ (I, 5, 21) *Ibid.*, p. 21. Cf. (I, 6, 194-5, 204-5) *Poverty of Philosophy*, pp. 110, 121; (I, 6, 532) *The Communist Manifesto*, Op. Cit., pp. 212-13; (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 482-3, 700) *Dialectics of Nature*, pp. 3, 289; *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 375-6, 396-7, 440, 461, 470-1.

²⁵² (I, 5, 63) *The German Ideology*, p. 74.

²⁵³ (I, 6, 528) *The Communist Manifesto*, Op. Cit., p. 207.

²⁵⁴ (I, 5, 65, 22 f) *The German Ideology*, pp. 22, 23, cf. 74 and 76 also; (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 303-4) *Anti-Dühring*, p. 318; Engels to Conrad Schmidt, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 480; *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 373, 391, 421, 440, 461-2, 470-2.

narrow, less and less interesting, less and less inclusive of his various potentials of ability, it has had the effect of stunting him, dehumanizing him, reducing him to a mere fragment of a man, a crippled monstrosity, an appendage to a machine.²⁶⁵

These observations are of enormous importance to our study of the historical materialist theory of human nature, but again they all involve normative judgments, and we are at present interested only in scientific ones, in what Marx and Engels think man is, not in what they think he ought to be. The place to speak of the normative question is in the final chapters, where the role of the ethical factor in the development of human nature is examined. Here the effort must be limited, as far as is possible, to the mere discovery of what Marx and Engels believed to be the actual manner of the causal operation.

How, then, specifically, does historical materialism portray the role of the division of labour — which, as we saw in the last section, was itself understood to be governed by class interests — in the determination of human nature? We may perhaps conveniently approach the problem by comparing with Engels, the type of “human nature” produced amongst the spinning and weaving population in Britain before and after the development of manufacture. Prior to manufacture, that is, under the *social* division of labour, the weaver was an independent craftsman, producing his yarn and weaving his cloth with the aid of his family, in his own home, and sending it into the nearby towns by the travelling agents who paid the family’s wages. Production was decentralized, competition was negligible, wages were usually high enough to permit the purchase of land, and the weaver was often a small time farmer as well. These, according to Engels, were approximately the objective conditions. What, he asks, were the results, in terms of “human nature,” of the type of occupation they afforded? The workers in question, he says, “vegetated throughout a passably comfortable existence, leading a righteous and peaceful life in all piety and probity . . . they did

²⁶⁵ *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 372–89, 395–400, 414–15, 440, 461–2, 470–1; (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 304, 307) *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 318, 322; (I, 5, 22) *The German Ideology*, p. 22; (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 482–3, 488) *Dialectics of Nature*, pp. 3, 10; (I, 6, 194–5, 201–2, 204–5) *Poverty of Philosophy*, pp. 110, 118, 121.

no more than they chose to do, and yet they earned what they needed. They had leisure for healthful work in garden or field, work which in itself was recreation for them, and they could take part besides in the recreations and games of their neighbours, and all these games . . . contributed to their physical health and vigour. They were, for the most part, strong, well-built people, in whose physique little or no difference from that of their peasant neighbours was discoverable. Their children grew up in the fresh country air, and if they could help their parents at work, it was only occasionally; while of eight or twelve hours of work for them there was no question . . . the weavers stood upon the moral and intellectual plane of the yeomen with whom they were usually immediately associated through their little holdings. They regarded their squire, the greatest landholder of the region, as their natural superior; they asked advice of him, laid their small disputes before him for settlement, and gave him all honour. . . . They were 'respectable' people, good husbands and fathers, led moral lives. . . . They had their children the whole day at home, and brought them up in obedience and the fear of God; the patriarchal relation remained undisturbed. . . . The young people grew up in idyllic simplicity and intimacy with their playmates until they married."²⁵⁶ This, in part, is Engels' description of the "human nature" of the British textile workers under the social division of labour.

What becomes of these people under the manufacturing division? In the first place, Engels shows, the inventions of the jenny, mule, throstle, carding machine, power loom, and steam engine have completely transformed the mode of textile production and the character of labour. The workers are now herded together in the great factory towns. Competition, due to technological unemployment, the Irish immigrations, and the widespread utilization of female and child labour, have robbed the worker, Engels claims, of his wages, bargaining power, dignity, security and hope. The simple, friendly, generous, placid farmer-weaver has become a human outcast. Engels allows Carlyle to paint the picture: "Their trade," he quotes from Carlyle's *Chartism*, ". . . is

²⁵⁶ (1, 4, 11-12) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, pp. 2-3.

of the nature of gambling; they live by it like gamblers. . . . Black, mutinous discontent devours them; simply the miserablest feeling that can inhabit the heart of man. English commerce . . . makes all paths uncertain for them, all life a bewilderment; society, steadfastness, peaceable continuance, the first blessing of man are not theirs. — This world is for them no home, but a dingy prison-house, of reckless unthrift, rebellion, rancour, indignation against themselves and against all men. . . . ”²⁵⁷

And what is true of textile workers, avers Engels, is true of all English industrial workers of the period. Look at them on the city streets, he says: “these Londoners have been forced to sacrifice the best qualities of their human nature . . . a hundred powers which slumbered within them have remained inactive, have been suppressed. . . . The very turmoil of the streets has something repulsive, something against which human nature rebels. The hundreds of thousands of all classes and ranks crowding past each other, are they not all human beings with the same qualities and powers, and with the same interest in being happy? And still they crowd by one another as though they had nothing in common, nothing to do with one another, and their only agreement is the tacit one, that each keep to his own side of the pavement . . . while it occurs to no man to honour another with so much as a glance. . . . This isolation of the individual, this narrow self-seeking is the fundamental principle of our society everywhere. . . . The dissolution of mankind into monads, of which each one has a separate principle, the world of atoms, is here carried out to its utmost extreme. . . . Everywhere barbarous indifference, hard egotism on the one hand, and nameless misery on the other, everywhere social warfare, every man’s house in a state of siege, everywhere reciprocal plundering under the protection of the law, and all so shameless, so openly avowed that one shrinks before the consequences of our social state as they manifest themselves here undisguised, and can only wonder that the whole crazy fabric still hangs together.”²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ (I, 4, 115–16) *Ibid.*, p. 117.

²⁵⁸ (I, 4, 29–30) *Ibid.*, pp. 23–5.

In this contrast between farmer-weaver and industrial proletarian the historical materialist theory of the occupational determination of human nature is amply illustrated. Let us now, still using the contrast between the social and the manufacturing division of labour, attend to some of the causal details that this theory distinguishes. For Marx, one of the chief effective differences between the two types of division appears to reside in the fact that in the former, the worker produces commodities, in the latter, he does not. Under the social division, to be sure, he specializes in the production of only one or, at most, a very limited number of types of commodities, but, says Marx, it is nonetheless commodities that he produces — complete products that have use or exchange value: the spinner produces yarn ready for weaving, the weaver makes a bolt of cloth, the tailor a suit, or, to enlarge the field of example somewhat, the cattle breeder produces a whole animal, the tanner makes a finished piece of leather out of it, the cobbler a complete pair of shoes. Under the manufacturing division, Marx claims, this is no longer true. The worker produces no commodities at all. His specialization of function is restricted, as Marx puts it, to the repetition of a partial operation in the production of commodities.²⁵⁹ In most branches, says Engels, his total activity “is reduced to some paltry, purely mechanical manipulation, repeated minute after minute, unchanged year after year.”²⁶⁰ It is not he, but the collectivized shop which produces commodities.

To Marx and Engels, the consequence for “human nature” seems obvious quite apart from any moral considerations. “How much human feeling, what abilities can a man retain in his thirtieth year,” asks Engels, “who has made needle points or filed toothed wheels twelve hours every day from his early childhood, living all the while under the conditions forced upon the English proletarian? It is still the same thing since the introduction of steam. The worker’s activity is made easy, muscular effort is saved, but the work itself becomes unmeaning and monotonous to the last degree. It offers no field for mental activity, but claims

²⁵⁹ *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 389–90.

²⁶⁰ (I, 4, 117) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, p. 119.

just enough of his attention to keep him from thinking of anything else. And a sentence to such work . . . leaving him scarcely enough time to eat and sleep, none for physical exercise in the open air, or the enjoyment of nature, much less for mental activity, how can such a sentence help degrading a human being to the level of a brute?"²⁶¹

Generalizing on the comparative effects on human beings of the two types of division of labour, Marx says: "The independent peasant or handicraftsman develops knowledge, insight, and will, even though it be only to a small degree. The savage makes the whole art of war consist in exercise of his personal cunning. Under the manufacturing system, these faculties are now required only for the workshop as a whole. Intelligence in production expands in one direction because it vanishes in many others. What the detail workers lose, is concentrated in the capital that employs them. As a result of the manufacturing division of labour, the worker is confronted by the intellectual powers of the material process of production whose property, whose slave, he has become. This process . . . detaches science from labour, making of science an independent force of production, and pressing it into the service of capital."²⁶² In short, as compared with the social division of labour, the manufacturing division of labour has the effect, as Marx and Engels see it, of divorcing intelligence from work, and hence of making a specialty out of it rather than a general human trait.²⁶³

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 396-7.

²⁶³ Elaborating this thought, Marx quotes from W. Thompson: "The man of knowledge and the productive labourer come to be widely divided from each other, and knowledge, instead of remaining the handmaid of labour in the hand of the labourer to increase his productive powers . . . has almost everywhere arrayed itself against labour—systematically deluding them [the labourers] and leading them astray in order to render their muscular powers entirely obedient and mechanical" (*Ibid.*, p. 397 n). In fact, Marx observes, there were once manufacturers "who preferred to employ semi-imbeciles to carry on operations of a simple character which were trade secrets" (*Ibid.*, p. 397). Elsewhere he adds Ferguson's testimony to the same point: ". . . Many mechanical arts . . . succeed perfectly well when they are totally devoid of the help of reason and sentiment, and ignorance is the mother of industry as well as of superstition. Reflection and imagination are subject to deviations; but the habit of moving the foot or the hand depends neither on the one nor on the other. Thus it might be said that perfection in manufacture consists in being able to do without the brain, so that without mental effort the workshop may be considered as a machine whose parts are men. . . . The commanding officer may be very skilled in the art of war, while the whole merit of the soldier is limited to the execution of a few movements of the

In the first place, then, the class-governed manufacturing division of labour tends, Marx and Engels believe, to create a human nature that is apt for the most part — since the great bulk of the population is engaged in labour — to be characterized by mental and spiritual fallowness and underdevelopment, by lack of imagination, sensitivity, inventiveness and understanding, by deficiencies in the ability to conceive, plan, and execute purposive labour — the faculty which, as we have previously seen was the one which, according to historical materialist theory, constituted the essential difference between man and brute.²⁶⁴ Conversely, Marx and Engels believe, among those few on which the manufacturing division of labour imposes the intellectual obligations of the enterprise of social production, a similarly one-sided human nature is developed, a narrow specialization of thinking takes place at the expense of doing, with the consequent underdevelopment of a whole wealth of human potentialities (and, according to Engels, with the consequent theoretical tendency to derive actions from thoughts instead of from needs, and the perverse growth of an idealistic world view).²⁶⁵ Moreover, within thinking itself a high degree of specialization develops; each person becomes more or less restricted to his own sphere of intellectual activity, and few there are who are not thereby robbed of any kind of comprehensive view.²⁶⁶

The fact however that, relative to the manufacturing or planned division of labour, the natural or social division tends to promote the development of a larger territory of human poten-

hand or foot. One may have gained what the other has lost. . . . In a period when everything is separated, the art of thinking may itself form a craft apart." (I, 6, 194-5) *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 110.

²⁶⁴ Marx summons Adam Smith in witness: "The understandings of the greater part of men," he quotes from *The Wealth of Nations*, "are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments. The man whose life is spent in performing a few simple operations . . . has no occasion to exert his understanding. . . . He generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become. . . . The uniformity of his stationary life naturally corrupts the courage of his mind. . . . It corrupts even the activity of his body, and renders him incapable of exerting his strength with vigour and perseverance in any other employments than that to which he has been bred. His dexterity at his own particular trade seems in this manner to be acquired at the expense of his intellectual, social, and martial virtues; but in every improved and civilized society, this is the state into which the labouring poor, that is, the great body of the people, must necessarily fall." *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 397-8.

²⁶⁵ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 700) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 289.

²⁶⁶ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 488) *Ibid.*, p. 10.

tialities, does not mean to Marx and Engels that the social division itself is without restrictive effects. "Even the division of labour in society at large," Marx claims, "entails some crippling both of mind and body."²⁶⁷ So long as each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced on him and from which he cannot escape,²⁶⁸ he becomes one kind of man rather than another, and always a more limited human being than might otherwise have been the case. "We are struck with admiration" Marx quotes Lemontey as saying, "when we see among the Ancients the same person distinguishing himself to a high degree as philosopher, poet, orator, historian, priest, administrator, general of an army. Our souls are appalled at the sight of so vast a domain. Each of us plants his hedge and shuts himself up in his enclosure. I do not know whether by this parcellation the field is enlarged, but I do know that man is belittled."²⁶⁹ He cites evidence, in the words of Dugald Stewart, that, "In some parts of the Highlands of Scotland, not many years ago, every peasant . . . made his own shoes of leather tanned by himself. Many a shepherd, and cotter too, with his wife and children, appeared . . . in clothes that had been touched by no hands but their own, since they were shorn from the sheep and sown in the flaxfield. In the preparation of these . . . scarcely a single article had been purchased, except the awl, needle, thimble, and a very few parts of the ironwork employed in the weaving. The dyes, too, were extracted by the women from trees, shrubs, and herbs."²⁷⁰ Now it seems obvious to Marx and Engels that when the natural division of labour separates weaver from spinner, cattle breeder from tanner, from bootmaker, judge from schoolmaster, from ranger,

²⁶⁷ *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 399.

²⁶⁸ (I, 5, 22) *The German Ideology*, p. 22.

²⁶⁹ (I, 6, 204) *The Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 121. Engels points to certain heroes who even as late as the Renaissance had escaped the restrictive effects of the division of labour, with its production of oneness. "What is especially characteristic of them," he observes, "is that they almost all pursue their lives and activities in the midst of the contemporary movements, in the practical struggle; they take sides and join in the fight, one by speaking and writing, another with the sword, many with both. Hence the fullness and force of character that makes them complete men. Men of the study are the exception — either persons of second or third rank or cautious philistines who do not want to burn their fingers." (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 482-3) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 3.

²⁷⁰ *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 531 n.

from bookkeeper, from astrologer, from smith, carpenter, potter, barber, laundryman, silversmith and poet,²⁷¹ a certain faculty of each is excellently developed — but usually at the expense of all other faculties. That this social division, like the manufacturing division is “a necessary phase in the economic development of society”²⁷² — no less for the maximum realization of human productive forces than as a consequence of the self interested demands of dominant classes — Marx of course affirms explicitly. He nonetheless regards it as the engenderer of “craft-idiocy.”²⁷³

The same thought is brought out by Engels in connection with his own farmer-weavers. These gentle folk, contented, kindly, physically enviable, who were called on by their occupations for a certain amount of initiative and intelligence both in their work and in the ordering of their lives, were nevertheless, he remarks pointedly, scarcely models of intellectual versatility and attainment. They rarely were able to read, he asserts, almost never to write; they never talked politics, never, in fact, thought; they went to church as a habit, listened with inherited reverence when the Bible was read, accepted with no suggestion of critical evaluation, the natural superiority of their “betters.” Intellectually, he says, “they were dead; lived only for their petty, private interest, for their looms and gardens. . . . They were comfortable in their silent vegetation, and but for the industrial revolution they would never have emerged from this existence, which, cosily romantic as it was, was nevertheless not worthy of human beings. In truth, they were not human beings; they were merely toiling machines in the service of the few aristocrats who had guided history down to that time.”²⁷⁴

What, then, in sum, do Marx and Engels believe to be the kind of human nature that the social division of labour creates? Relative to the manufacturing division, it creates, as they see it, a being who constructs a product in his head before he forges it with his hands, who initiates, regulates and controls the material reactions between himself and nature, who consciously and

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 389, 392-3.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 400, 531-5.

²⁷³ (I, 6, 204) *The Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 121.

²⁷⁴ (I, 4, 12) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, pp. 3-4.

purposely manipulates her productions into a form suitable to his own wants, who masters nature — in short, it creates a man, in the most essential biologically differentiating meaning of the term for Marx and Engels.²⁷⁶ Relative to no division of labour, however — and no division of labour is itself a relative concept since, historically speaking, there is always actually some division²⁷⁷ — it creates a partial or fragmentary man, an unfree man, a human being who is slave to his specialty, a craft idiot. And the social division of labour does more than create craft idiots; for class interests, as we were shown in the preceding chapter, turning this division to their own uses, petrify and ossify occupations in guilds and castes, thus, as Marx and Engels see it, perpetuating craft idiocy, crystallizing it in historical time, making an "enduring" human nature out of it.

The consequences which Marx and Engels paint of the social division of labour alone would doubtless have been enough to have made Ferguson exclaim, as Marx quotes him;²⁷⁷ "We make a nation of Helots and have no free citizens." But they believe that the manufacturing division of labour, even before the introduction of large scale machinery, has effects that are even more marked. Marx charges it with "cutting at the very roots of the individual's life," for, quoting Urquhart, "to subdivide a man is to execute him, if he deserves the sentence, to assassinate him, if he does not. . . . The subdivision of labour is the assassination of a people."²⁷⁸

As he and Engels understood the matter, the separation which they exhibited between man's mental life and his productive life, with the consequent enfeeblement of the former, is only a single phase of a general and elaborate subdivision to which the manufacturing division of labour subjects human beings. Under the social division of labour, a watch, for example, says Marx, "was the *individual* product of a Nuremberg handicraftsman." Under the manufacturing division of labour, even where large scale machinery is not employed, it becomes "the *social* product of an

²⁷⁶ See above, pp. 66-9.

²⁷⁷ See above, p. 86.

²⁷⁸ *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 389.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 399.

immense number of detail workers. . . ."²⁷⁹ Each ruby-lever maker, each dial enameller, each *finisseur de barillet, acheveur de pignon, graveur, ciseleur, polisseur de boîte*, devotes himself hour after hour, day after day, year after year, usually for a lifetime, to the "perpetual repetition of one and the same limited operation." When the matter is considered closely, says Marx, it is not difficult to see that the "worker who carries out one and the same simple operation for a lifetime, converts his whole body into the automatic specialized instrument of that operation,"²⁸⁰ that "the habit of doing one and the same thing transforms him into an unfailing instrument, while his connection with the whole mechanism compels him to work with the regularity of a part of a machine."²⁸¹

The kind of human nature, then — other things being equal — that this class-ridden manufacturing subdivision creates, is both obvious and outraging to Marx and Engels. In Marx's words, it makes of the worker "a cripple, a monster, by forcing him to develop some highly specialized dexterity at the cost of a world of productive impulses and faculties — much as in Argentina they slaughter a whole beast simply in order to get its hide or its tallow. Not merely are the various partial operations allotted to different individuals; but the individual himself is split up, is transformed into the automatic motor of some partial operation. Thus is realized the foolish fable of Menenius Agrippa, which depicted a human being as nothing more than a fragment of his own body."²⁸²

And, says Marx, just as class interests under the social division of labour found a mechanism in castes, guilds, and "mysteries" for crystallizing the situation, for making an enduring human nature of craft idiocy, so, under the manufacturing division the dominant classes find ready at hand, in the very organization of the workshop, a mechanism for making an enduring human na-

²⁷⁹ Mainspring-makers, dial-makers, hairspring-makers, jewelled hole makers, ruby-lever makers, screw-makers, etc. Marx distinguishes in all, but without exhausting the list, approximately forty classes of detail workers. (*Ibid.*, p. 376). The emphases in the passage quoted are mine.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 372.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 383-4.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 396.

ture out of these fragmentary men, these automatic motors of partial operations. "The perpetual repetition of the same limited operation," he argues, "and the concentration of his attention on it teach the worker by experience, how to achieve the desired end with the minimum exertion. Since several generations of workers live together at the same time and co-operate in the manufacture of a given article, the tricks of the trade they acquire by experience, the technical skill, become established, accumulate, and are handed down. In actual fact, manufacture produces the skill of the detail worker by reproducing within the workshop, and by systematically driving to an extreme, the differentiation of trades which it finds ready to hand as a natural growth of society."²⁸³ The petrification of human types is thus, he believes, as assured under the manufacturing, as it was previously under the social division of labour.

Thus far we have been considering the manufacturing division of labour only as it occurs in the earlier phases of the bourgeois capitalist mode of production, before the widespread use of machinery. And already it has been possible to sift enough naked fact from the Marxian polemic to have gained a general view of what historical materialism regards as the manner in which humans are shaped by their employment. When machinery is introduced on a large scale into the manufacturing division of labour, however, a factor is added that, according to Marx and Engels, is of tremendous and immediate effect in the determination and changing of human nature. And it is therefore from their studies of "machino-facture," or large scale machine industry, that the student is able to gain the most complete, detailed, and concretely illustrated conception of their theory.²⁸⁴

When the manufacturing division of labour supplanted the social division of labour, it made, Marx and Engels have said, a fractional operator of the worker. If he was no longer a commodity-producing animal, however, he remained at least, they remark, a tool-using animal. Each specialist had and manipulated the specialized instruments of his operation — the dial

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 372-3.

²⁸⁴ See, for example, *Capital*, Vol. I, Chapters XV and XXV; Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Chapter V (also subsequent chapters).

enameller his brushes, knives and melting pot, the *graveur*, his chisels. He guided these instruments, not they him. Thus his work during the earlier years of the manufacturing division of labour, though monotonous and crippling, was not utterly devoid of interest.

But with the introduction of large scale industrial machinery, the character of the manufacturing division of labour, Marx shows, was changed quite radically. The worker handling a single tool was replaced "by a mechanism operating simultaneously a number of identical or similar tools, and driven by a single motive power. . . ." ²⁸⁵ The great industrial plant emerged with hundreds of working machines, each performing a partial operation, simultaneously operated by a prime motor.

What of the worker now, as Marx and Engels see him? Not only does he make no commodities, but he makes no parts of them. He makes nothing. Man, the producing animal has ceased to produce; he just works. Moreover, man, the tool using animal, no longer uses tools; instead, the tools use him. In manufacture, though he was lackey to his human masters, he was master of his tools. In machino-facture he is master of nothing, slave to everything, even — most degrading, most dehumanizing, according to Marx and Engels — to a lifeless mechanism whose commands, to save his fingers, limbs and life, he must obey instantly, blindly, unthinkingly. This, for Marx, is perhaps the chief difference, insofar as it affects human nature, between the earlier and later stages of the manufacturing division of labour. "In the former case," he says, "the movements of the instrument of labour proceed from the worker; but in the latter, the movements of the worker are subordinate to those of the machine." ²⁸⁶ In the former, labour power consists in the worker's "skill in handling a particular tool"; in the latter, "the guiding of the tool becomes the work of the machine," and the worker's labour

²⁸⁵ At first, says Marx, this power of course was human, so that if the worker's skill was no longer needed, his muscles, at least, were. But this obviously could not last, he says. "As soon as man, instead of working with a tool upon the object of labour, becomes merely the motive-power for a working machine, it becomes a mere chance that the motive power takes the form of human muscles; for wind, water, steam, or some other mechanical power, may be easily substituted." *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 410.

²⁸⁶ *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 461.

power loses its value.²⁸⁷ "In manufacture, the workers are part of a living mechanism. In the factory, *i.e.*, in machino-facture, there exists a lifeless mechanism independent of them, and they are incorporated into that mechanism as its living appendages.²⁸⁸ Whereas before the worker was tied for life to a partial operation, he is now tied to the machine, and it is the machine which performs the partial operation.²⁸⁹ The worker no longer uses the instruments of labour, but they use him; they enter into competition with him and they lay him low."²⁹⁰

What do Marx and Engels believe to be the consequences, in human terms, of this transformed relation between the worker and his instrument? "Through its conversion into an automaton," says Marx, "the instrument of labour comes to confront the worker during the labour process as . . . dead labour, that dominates, and pumps dry living labour-power. . . . The special skill of each individual machine worker dwindles into an insignificant item as contrasted with the science, with the gigantic physical forces, and with the mass of social labour, which are incorporated into the machine system, and out of which the power of the 'master' is made . . . the master, in whose brain the machinery and his monopoly of it are inseparably united." The divorce of intellect from labour, and the enslavement of the worker to an alien intellectual power are here, says Marx, completed.²⁹¹

But this is not all. As capital, and through the instrumentality of the capitalists, Marx goes on to maintain, this automaton, machinery, possesses both consciousness and a will. In its perpetual motion it encounters in its human slave certain obstacles — his bodily weakness and his human will. "It is therefore animated with an urge to reduce to a minimum the resistance offered by that natural but elastic barrier, man."²⁹² Not content, in short, with his enslavement to it, the automaton demands that the worker emulate it, that he become an automaton himself. He

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 470.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 461-2.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 530.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 461, 470, 472.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 462.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 440.

must be trained from early youth upwards so that he can learn to adapt his own movements to the uniform and continuous motions of the machine.²⁹³ "It is found nearly impossible," Marx quotes a well-known defender of the system²⁹⁴ as complaining, "to convert persons past the age of puberty into useful factory hands."

Even the lightening of labour by the machine — in the rare cases where there is such lightening — has its stultifying, dehumanizing effects, Marx and Engels claim, "for the machine," in Marx's words, "does not free the worker from his work, but merely deprives his work of interest."²⁹⁵ "Nothing is more terrible," Engels believes, "than being constrained to do some one thing every day from morning to night against one's will . . . the more a man the worker feels himself, the more hateful must his work be to him, because he feels the constraint, the aimlessness of it for himself. . . . He works only for money, for a thing which has nothing whatsoever to do with the work itself; and he works . . . in such unbroken monotony, that this alone must make his work a torture . . . if he has the least human feeling left."²⁹⁶

Moreover, as the repulsiveness of the work increases, Marx and Engels point out, the wage, and all it makes possible by way of an expansive, genuinely human life outside the shop, decreases.²⁹⁷ For, since little skill is demanded of the worker, little training is required, and the "cost of producing" him is largely restricted to food, shelter, and the minimum conditions that will enable him to propagate similar automata. He has no comeback. There are too many like him desperately anxious to take his place for a bare subsistence wage.²⁹⁸

Thus it is, as Marx and Engels see it, that the work is in fact almost never lightened, that, generally speaking "in proportion as the use of machinery and the division of labour increases, in

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 460.

²⁹⁴ Ure, cited by Marx, *Ibid.*, p. 463.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 462.

²⁹⁶ (I, 4, 114-15) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, pp. 118-19; cf. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

²⁹⁷ (I, 6, 532) *The Communist Manifesto*, Op. Cit., p. 212.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

the same proportion the burden of toil also increases.”²⁹⁹ A large and ever ready industrial reserve army of women, children and unemployed males allows the owner, with the same impunity with which he reduced wages, to prolong the working day, exact more work in a given time, increase the speed of the machinery, etc.³⁰⁰ To what Marx and Engels considered the stultifying, dehumanizing effects of monotony, meaningless toil, subjugation to both masters and machine, are therefore now, they point out, added those of overwork — the whole taking place, as they see it, under conditions that are gravely deleterious to basic bodily health. “All the senses,” says Marx, “are alike injured by the artificially raised temperature, by the dust-laden atmosphere, by the deafening noise, to say nothing of the danger to life and limb that results from the close-crowded machinery, which, with the regularity of the seasons fills its lists of those killed and wounded in the industrial process. . . . The worker is robbed of space, of air, of light, and of protection of his person against the dangerous and unwholesome accompaniments of the productive process. . . .”³⁰¹

It would be strange indeed, Engels believed, if the whistle did not find the worker overcome at the end of each day by deadly, aching, brutalizing exhaustion, with neither energy nor will to pursue, outside the plant, activities that might develop whatever human potentialities may be left unatrophied by the narrow specialization of his daytime occupation.³⁰² What will he do on “his own time”? Resort obviously, believes Engels, to the beer-house or the brothel, the peep-show or the crime sheet — the only pleasures which the bourgeoisie has left the working class to purchase with its wearying toil.³⁰³ Thus are his tastes formed, and since the majority are like him, thus are some of the dominant cultural facilities of his nation established.³⁰⁴ Is humanity better off if the worker stays at home, in a comfortless, ill-furnished, fetid, overcrowded house? What decent family life is possible

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 212-13.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.* Also *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 445-6.

³⁰¹ *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 465-6, cf. 500.

³⁰² Cf. (I, 4, 101-2) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, pp. 102-3.

³⁰³ (I, 4, 126-7) *Ibid.*, pp. 128-9.

³⁰⁴ Cf. (I, 4, 124-5) *Ibid.*, pp. 126-7.

under such conditions? Who is to blame him for snarling at his wife, as she at him, tyrannizing his children, or falling stupidly and hopelessly asleep — thus carrying the vocationally determined pattern of his domestic life into the individual psychological development of future generations? ⁸⁰⁵

Everything about him, his body, his mind, his morality, his character, his relations with his fellows — all of the activities and powers which constitute his own history and those of his wife and children as individual human beings are conditioned, Marx and Engels believe, by his class and occupation. Let us follow them at random, for illustrative purposes, along some of the causal lines. Is he a free man in any specific sense of the word? They cannot consider him one. The last specific freedom that remained to him after he could no longer produce commodities nor guide his own tools, was, they believed, his contractual freedom to sell his own labour power to a free buyer. Now, says Marx, that transaction has lost even “the appearance of a contract between free persons,” ⁸⁰⁶ for it is a forced contract, of which the buyer sets the terms. Moreover, Marx maintains, by lowering wages enough the buyer may force the worker, simply in order to make ends meet, to put his wife and children to work, in which case the consequences for his own contractual relations are bitterly ironic: “In former days,” says Marx, “the worker sold his own labour power, which he disposed of nominally as a free agent. Now he sells his wife and children. He has become a slave trader.” ⁸⁰⁷

No less ironic in Marx's dialectical perspective are the consequences, for his basic material interests and those of his family, of this “slave trading.” By putting his family on the labour market for the sake of a greater total income, the worker automatically lowers still further the price that can be commanded for his own, and other adult male, labour. Female and child labour is cheaper; female and child labour greatly augment the industrial reserve army; the wage scale is therefore progressively lowered,

⁸⁰⁵ Cf. (I, 4, 127) *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁸⁰⁶ *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 434.

⁸⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

not only for males, but for women and children too. Eventually it approximates again the subsistence level of a working class family, though now the whole family instead of one member must work to maintain this subsistence.⁸⁰⁸

Thus, Marx and Engels argue, not even the bare economic lot of the family is actually alleviated by the employment of many of its members. Thus, they claim, there is no gain at all in the various possibilities for a salutary "human" development that elementary comforts establish. And what is lost seems obvious to them. Now the whole series of dehumanizing influences through which they followed the father is seen to be operating directly, instead of indirectly as formerly, upon mother and older children as well. And the action in the case of the latter, says Marx, is even more rapid and definitive, for they are weaker, more pliable, less resistant;⁸⁰⁹ men need to be broken to their slave-like automatism; children need only be shaped. And they are shaped—into crippled and deformed pygmies, says Engels.⁸¹⁰ Boy operatives who are put into the shop at a tender age, who are forced to some brutally monotonous and stupefying task for as much as sixteen hours at a stretch, given no opportunities for developing intelligence, skill and judgment, become, Marx

⁸⁰⁸ Specifically, as Marx explains it, the economic dialectic is this: the labour power of a family of four workers may perhaps cost the manufacturer more than he had to pay for that of the head of the family alone. But he now "buys four days' labour in place of one, and their price falls in proportion to the excess of the surplus labour of four over the surplus labour of one. In order that the family may live, four persons must now not merely work, but supply surplus labour for capital." Should there for a time be a somewhat greater total income than before, nothing positive by way of the development of human nature can be milked from it, Marx declares, for inevitably some sort of substitute must be found for the mothers and older children who have been confiscated by capital from their domestic activities; such functions of the family "as nursing and suckling children cannot be entirely dispensed with. . . . Domestic work, such as sewing, mending, etc., must be replaced by the purchase of ready-made commodities. Consequently the reduced expenditure of domestic labour is accompanied by an increased expenditure of money. The cost of keeping the family therefore increases, until it balances the greater income." *Ibid.*, pp. 431 and 432 n.

⁸⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 440.

⁸¹⁰ (I, 4, 146 ff) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, p. 150 ff. He cites many pages of medical evidence for the universal physical malformation of working children. Spinal curvatures, distorted legs, thick, twisted ankles, pelvic malformations, swollen joints, varicose veins, and persistent ulcers almost invariably signify the child operative, he shows, as do all manner of diseases, the most common being scrofula, consumption, mesenteric affections and indigestion. "If people from the country were not constantly coming in," testifies one surgeon whom he quotes, "the race of mill hands would soon be wholly degenerate." (I, 4, 152) *Ibid.*, p. 157.

shows, quite abnormal creatures, little better than savages, and often, when they have grown too old for boy's work, they are discharged to swell the ranks of the criminal classes, for "attempts to find employment for them in other fields are frustrated by their ignorance, their brutality, their mental and bodily degradation."⁸¹¹ Girl operatives become quite defeminized by such conditions of employment. They develop into "rough, foul-mouthed boys," says one writer whom Marx quotes, "before nature has taught them that they are women."⁸¹² And when they, in turn, are discharged, or thrown out of work during unemployment crises, their only recourse is often to prostitution, a trade for which they are admirably well prepared mentally, if not physically, by the demoralizing conditions of their ordinary employment and home life.⁸¹³

If Marx and Engels deplored the direction of the human development of these child operatives, if they saw them turned into brutes rather than humans by the employments they were compelled to follow, they regarded the plight of the working mother as equally, if not more, outrageous. Our business here, however, is not to moralize with them, but to understand their theory. The mother's sorry situation, they believed, was even more far-reaching in its total human consequences than was that of the children. Not only, as they saw it, must she perform the same exhausting, crippling labour as they — if indeed not more, because of her presumably adult strength — but she must do so much of the time under conditions either of pregnancy or lactation, often being allowed to interrupt her toils for as little as two or three days for delivery. We need not dwell with Engels on the details of this situation.⁸¹⁴ Obviously such mothers will suffer great pain, untold physical injury, premature age and debility. Obviously children of such mothers cannot be vigorous. Nor is it surprising that such mothers should, as Marx and Engels claim, be affected mentally, even to the point of an estrangement of

⁸¹¹ *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 530-1.

⁸¹² *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 508.

⁸¹³ (I, 4, 144-5, 147, 172, 194-5) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, pp. 148-9, 152, 204-5, *et al.*; *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 501, 506-7, *et al.*

⁸¹⁴ (I, 4, 155-7, 139-40) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, pp. 161-3, 143-4.

feeling, a denaturalization toward their offspring.⁸¹⁵ Children are frequently sold out like any slave labour, for the most inhuman occupations.⁸¹⁶ Infanticide becomes a not uncommon practice, children are poisoned or purposely allowed to starve,⁸¹⁷ and relatively few, Marx and Engels claim, are the working mothers who do not resort to narcotics to keep their children still when what is needed is maternal care.⁸¹⁸

Of all the consequences of multiple employment within the family, perhaps the most influential and far-reaching in the determination of proletarian "human nature," Marx and Engels believe, is the break up of the family organization. Family life, they have shown, was always at best difficult enough for working class people to maintain. Now, with mother and older children away in the mill along with the father for twelve or thirteen hours a day, it becomes, says Engels, impossible.⁸¹⁹ And with this final shattering of the last remnants of the traditional patriarchal configuration, goes, of course, a whole set of human relations, standards and influences that, for better or worse, make man one type of animal creature rather than another. ". . . all family ties among the proletarians," proclaims *The Manifesto*, "are torn asunder, and their children transformed into simple articles of commerce and instruments of labour."⁸²⁰ Younger children, when not exploited, are neglected and mismanaged. They grow up, says Engels, like weeds. Unsuitable food, irregularity of food, dosing with opiates, inadequate instruction and training, lack of surveillance, lack of affection, lack, in short, of the rudimentary attention to body and spirit which any human child requires, become, according to *Capital*, the order of the day.⁸²¹ Child deaths from scalds, burns, falls, drownings, traf-

⁸¹⁵ *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 435. "A mother who has no time to trouble herself about her child," says Engels, "to perform the most ordinary loving services for it during its first year, who scarcely indeed sees it, can be no real mother to the child, must inevitably grow indifferent to it, treat it unlovingly like a stranger." (I, 4, 140) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, p. 144.

⁸¹⁶ *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 433, 432 n.

⁸¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 433-4 and 435 n.

⁸¹⁸ *Ibid.*; also (I, 4, 139) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, p. 143.

⁸¹⁹ *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, pp. 141, 143.

⁸²⁰ (I, 6, 542) *Op. Cit.*, p. 224.

⁸²¹ Vol. I, p. 435, cf. (I, 4, 139-43) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, pp. 142-7.

fic and other accidents, as well as from diseases, malnutrition and opiates, assume terrible proportions, Engels shows;³²² so do child crime and licentiousness; basic intellectual education and physical and moral training fall off correspondingly. Indeed, in order to understand their grounds for an occupational theory of the determination of human nature, it is not necessary to follow Marx and Engels through the distressing details of child-conditioning in the working class England of their day; we need only remark the child mortality figures. In 1840, according to public statistics that Engels cites, less than half of the working class children of Manchester survived their fifth year; in Liverpool, the life expectancy of the proletariat as a whole was but fifteen years!³²³ It would be scarcely reasonable to doubt that conditions which slew so many, branded for life, in every aspect of their "human" natures, those who chanced to survive.

And so it goes, according to their theory. Do we seek the causes of drunkenness? — in the Glasgow of 1840, claims Engels, one house in ten was a public house, not counting hush-shops (speakeasies).³²⁴ Of prostitution? — Engels, not mentioning brothel inmates, speaks of 40,000 streetwalkers in London.³²⁵ Of crime? — Engels cites statistics to show that there were 4,189 criminal arrests in Scotland, 31,309 in England and Wales in a single year. If we want causes, says Engels, let us correlate these figures with the growth of the industrial proletariat. Crime, for example: a third of a century earlier there were, says Engels, only 89 arrests in Scotland, 4,605 in England and Wales; the sevenfold increase measures the years of British industrialization. The correlation cannot be coincidental, he avers, for of the criminals only about six percent could read and write well, less than a fourth of one percent had enjoyed a higher education: the majority were obviously of the proletariat. Moreover, the offenses were largely against property, "and what a man has," he points out reasonably enough, "he does not steal"; the source is obviously want in

³²² (I, 4, 106 ff, 139) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, pp. 107 ff, 142.

³²³ (I, 4, 106) *Ibid.*, p. 107; cf. p. 150, and *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 434.

³²⁴ (I, 4, 124-5) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, pp. 126-7.

³²⁵ (I, 4, 126) *Ibid.*, p. 128.

some form.³²⁶ For that matter, Engels asks, why should the proletarian not steal? What penalties has the law that are worse than his normal lot? Or, who has taught him "morality"? — certainly, he says, the moral training denied to him with schooling is not supplied by the other conditions of his life. Who, indeed, *could* teach him morality of this particular kind? "It is all very pretty," Engels comments, "and very agreeable to the ear of the bourgeois to hear the 'sacredness of property' asserted; but for him who has none, the sacredness of property dies out of itself."³²⁷

This indifference to bourgeois property values extends for much the same reasons, according to Marx and Engels, to all other phases of bourgeois morality or professed morality. The bourgeois reproaches the proletarian, they say, for his open disregard of established sexual conventions. But what, they ask, is to give him this respect? His upbringing? His education? His conditions of work — where, in the factories, persons of both sexes, scantily clad because of the heat, are crowded together for long hours in small space?³²⁸ Where, in the mines, women, girls and men are often harnessed naked side by side?³²⁹ His living conditions — where parents and children and even boarders of both sexes sleep in the same room, and often in the same beds?³³⁰ His employer — when a hint or threat from him is expected to put the worker's wife or daughter at his disposal? "Factory servitude, like any other," says Engels, "confers the *jus primae noctis* upon the master."³³¹ Indeed, Marx and Engels claim, nothing could be better calculated than the behaviour of the bourgeoisie itself to give the worker contempt for its professed sexual standards. For the worker, they claim, but practices openly and frankly what the bourgeoisie does clandestinely behind a screen of hypocrisy and cant. "How many of the 40,000 prostitutes," asks Engels, "live upon the virtuous bourgeoisie?" How many of them owe

³²⁶ (I, 4, 127-8) *Ibid.*, pp. 130-1.

³²⁷ (I, 4, 114) *Ibid.*, p. 115.

³²⁸ (I, 4, 144, 150-1, 147-8) *Ibid.*, pp. 148, 156, 152; *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 831.

³²⁹ *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 430; cf. (I, 4, 238) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, p. 250.

³³⁰ (I, 4, 68) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, p. 65.

³³¹ (I, 4, 145, 173) *Ibid.*, pp. 149, 181.

their present state to an initial seduction by a bourgeois? ⁸⁸² Moreover, proclaims *The Manifesto* ⁸⁸³ "Our bourgeois, not content with having the wives and daughters of their proletarians at their disposal, not to speak of common prostitutes, take the greatest pleasure in seducing each other's wives." Bourgeois marriage itself, Marx and Engels believed, where women are regarded essentially as instruments of production, is in reality merely a system of wives in common, a community of women springing from the reigning system of both public and private prostitution. ⁸⁸⁴ For they saw modern marriage and modern prostitution as merely two sides of the same coin; the former, with its imposition of monogamy on the woman, arising from the concentration of great riches in the hand of a single man and the need to bequeath those riches to the children of that man and not of any other — a requirement which imposes no restriction whatever on male sexual freedom. "What for the woman is a crime drawing in its train grave legal and social consequences," Engels says, "for a man is regarded as honourable or at worst as a slight moral blemish, easily tolerated." ⁸⁸⁵ Modern prostitution was therefore, in his estimation, simply a continuation of ancient hetærisism for the benefit of men, and modern adultery, in part at least, merely an expression of woman's rebellion against the exclusive supremacy of men in a patriarchal society. ⁸⁸⁶ The *Code Napoléon*, he recalls, decrees that "*L'enfant conçu pendant le mariage a pour père le mari.*" The proper, pious bourgeoisie finds it necessary to legislate formally that the child conceived during marriage has for its father — the husband! Such, he exclaims, "is the last result of three thousand years of monogamy." And the proletariat is expected to develop other than contempt for bourgeois standards. ⁸⁸⁷

And so it is in general, according to the historical materialist understanding of the situation, that the worker develops indifference to, or even open contempt for and rebellion against, the

⁸⁸² (I, 4, 126) *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁸⁸³ (I, 6, 542-3) *Op. Cit.*, p. 224.

⁸⁸⁴ (I, 6, 543) *Ibid.*, pp. 224-5.

⁸⁸⁵ *Origin of the Family*, p. 90.

⁸⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 81-2, and *passim*.

⁸⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

whole of the existing social structure — its laws, conventions, professions and beliefs.³⁸⁸ "Law, morality, religion, are to him so many bourgeois prejudices," maintains *The Manifesto*, "behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests."³⁸⁹ The social order gives him little; indeed, as Marx and Engels saw it, it hangs together by what it manages to take away from him.³⁴⁰ He will welcome the end of it, meanwhile feeling allegiance to no part of it and lending conformance only as he has to. Thus it is, in Engels' summary words, "that the working class has gradually become a race wholly apart from the bourgeoisie," a "radically dissimilar" nation, with "other dialects . . . other thoughts and ideals, other customs and moral principles, a different religion and other politics. . . ."³⁴¹

It would be superfluous, I believe, to produce further evidence that Marx and Engels subscribed to an occupational as well as to a class theory of the determination of human nature. There is an obvious temptation to follow to completion their account of the genesis of proletarian human nature and to complement it by piecing together, from their more scattered and less copious writings on the subject a similar picture of the formation of bourgeois nature, but although this would be interesting and perhaps useful, it would prove nothing to the present point beyond what has already been shown — that in their view, it is the way men make their living that determines the kind of men they will be, and that it is classes that determine the way in which they make their living. Nor need we attempt any additional generalizations as to the *modus operandi* of these class and occupational influences as Marx and Engels understood the matter. We have, through their eyes, seen them actually at work in the process of forging out one distinct and specific type of human

³⁸⁸ (I, 4, 127) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, p. 130.

³⁸⁹ (I, 6, 536) *Op. Cit.*, p. 217.

³⁴⁰ "The law," says Engels, "which reduces the *value* of labour-power to the value of the necessary means of subsistence, and the other law which reduces its *average price*, as a rule, to the minimum of those means of subsistence, these laws act upon them [the workers] with the irresistible force of an automatic engine, which crushes them between its wheels." *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, p. xv.

³⁴¹ (I, 4, 122) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, p. 124. Engels refers, of course, to the England of the eighteen-forties.

nature. This should communicate more about the historical materialist view of their manner of action in establishing other types of human nature — freeman, slave, patrician, guildmaster, lawyer, professor, beggarman or thief — than any general formula could do. What Marx and Engels conceived to be their general manner of action is quite apparent in their account of the particular action we have examined.

It should be clear by now that historical materialism has a carefully considered answer to the question which set us off on this examination of its theory of production, of classes, and of the division of labour — the question of why it is that man, who has dealt so successfully with nature, who has become a producing animal beyond the wildest imaginings of his relatively recent progenitors, has made such a failure of history. The answer in general is this: man has made bad history because, in the dialectics of production, he has never been in a position to prevent the means of production from entering into destructive conflict with the relations of production. Specifically, so preoccupied has he been with the immediate and practical exigencies of producing and assuring from the available means of production, a preferred livelihood for himself as against his fellows, that he has not been able to anticipate and control the long term historical and human consequences of that material production itself. As a result, the objective factor of production, nature and technics, in the long run inevitably acts counter to rather than in support of the subjective factor, human needs and their appropriate social organization. The historical and human precipitate is thus something unplanned and unintended.

That this has been true in the past, history itself stands witness, Marx and Engels believed. The primitive community substituted iron for stone tools with the immediately practical purpose of greater efficiency in production; clearly no one intended, nor even anticipated the social-historical consequences — breakdown of the communal system itself and the introduction of slavery. The bourgeoisie of the middle ages, they say, erected manufacturing establishments simply to augment the production of the guild workshops; they neither desired nor foresaw

the bloody social revolutions which history inevitably brought in their wake. Modern capital perfected the industrial machine, subdued with it the forces of nature, pressed them into the service of mankind, and thereby, to continue Engels' words, so greatly multiplied production, that now a child produces more than a hundred adults previously did; if there was any anticipation of social consequences, it was the easy optimistic expectation of a better, richer, easier life for labouring humanity. But what were the actual results? Those that Marx and Engels have been exhibiting: "Increasing overwork," as Engels summarizes it, "increasing misery of the masses, and every ten years a great collapse."⁸⁴² No, "the most essential historical activity of men," says Engels, "the one that has raised them from bestiality to humanity and which forms the material foundation for all their other activities, namely the production of their requirements of life, that is today social production, is above all subject to the interplay of unintended effects from uncontrolled forces and achieves its desired end only by way of exception and, much more frequently, the exact opposite."⁸⁴³

This of course emphasizes the difference between man's procedure in the control of nature, where according to Marx and Engels he has been successful, and his procedure in the making of history, where they see him as something of a failure. In the former case, they point out, he has been scientific, in the latter, not. In the former case he has constructed plans in his head before realizing them in nature. In the latter, he has achieved his social product with no notion of what he was doing and only the vaguest that he was doing it. Man builds a house, a bridge, a turbine or a telescope by manipulating objective materials into a needed form in accordance with a purpose; he makes history, they show by contrast, as an indirect result, as, one might almost say, an incidental by-product of quite another activity, the activity of fighting his fellows for the immediately practical objective of procuring, from the available means of production, a preferred security and livelihood. That the historical product is wanting

⁸⁴² (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 495) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 19.

⁸⁴³ *Ibid.*

should, Marx and Engels believe, occasion no surprise. Without conscious and deliberate planning, without a certain amount of clarity, singleness and unanimity of purpose, without relative freedom from the obstructionist activity of other men, and finally, without opportunity for anticipating and controlling the relatively remote as well as the immediate physical consequences of his scientific operations, could man have controlled nature any better than he has made history?

So while it is true for Marx and Engels that "men make their history themselves,"³⁴⁴ it is more pertinently true that they do so "under very definite presuppositions and conditions,"³⁴⁵ and that heretofore these definite conditions have never been such as to permit them to pursue their enterprise "with a collective will, or according to a collective plan, or even in a definitely defined, given society. Their efforts clash . . ." ³⁴⁶ "what each individual wills is obstructed by everyone else, and what emerges is something that no one willed."³⁴⁷

This, then, for Marx and Engels, is history — a consequence of men's actions but not of their conscious intentions, a collective mean, a common resultant of innumerable wills and intentions that conforms, however, to none of them.³⁴⁸ Thus history is not even a human product within their proper meaning for the term, for human products are intentional material creations of human thought and purposive activity. Politely, history is a by-product, in truth, it is a mere precipitate, of the clash and jangle of conflicting human interests which constitutes the running chronicle of class struggle. History is in fact, they tell us, class struggle.

Human nature, history's "offspring," could scarcely in these circumstances, have distinguished itself. It is clear why Marx and Engels feel that one need not look to original sin for the source of its inadequacies. Man, they believe, masters the forces of nature, but is cowed by those of society, which dominate him

³⁴⁴ Engels to Starkenburg, *Selected Correspondence*, pp. 517-18.

³⁴⁵ Engels to Bloch, *Op. Cit.*, p. 475.

³⁴⁶ *Op. Cit.*, p. 518.

³⁴⁷ *Op. Cit.*, p. 476.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

as a power independent of him. Slave to classes, slave to the conditions which precipitate from the conflict of classes, man is and has always been, as plebeian, patrician, serf, lord, journeyman, guildmaster, bourgeois or proletarian, no "truly human" animal, but merely a "class" animal, no creator of history, but history's creature.

Is he, then, for Marx and Engels, truly a man? Or is he a mouse? Let us, then, in conclusion, see whether, or to what extent, man — the offspring and lackey of history — is, in the scheme of historical materialism, an agent, rather than a patient, an actor rather than a sufferer, in the historical process that determines and transforms his own nature.

CHAPTER X

Patience: Utopianism

THERE IS AN OBVIOUS SENSE in which the dialectical incompatibility between what things are, and what they ought to be, might even by Marx be considered to be the motor of history. Interpreted after the manner of idealist ethics, the thought, of course, is totally un-Marxian. And, as a circumlocution for the statement that a man wants only what he hasn't got, it is merely a pompous tautology. But if its intention is to underline the fact that human beings require, for their maintenance and development, certain definable things from both nature and society, that their felt need for these things goads them into the activity of trying to appropriate them, and finally, that history is a consequence of these appropriatively intended activities, then the statement represents what Marx and Engels regard both as a dialectical truism and the historical materialist position.

Now the Marxian view of what, in respect to human nature and history, things ought to be, would be abundantly evident, even if Marx and Engels did not make it otherwise explicit, from the manner of the Marxian account of what things are. History ought, obviously, like the control of nature, to be planned, consciously organized, intended. History ought to be produced, like any other production, for a purpose. History's purpose ought, since history is of mankind and not of discriminatively chosen men, to be broadly human, not narrowly individual; hence human activity ought to be aimed not individualistically at the preferred livelihood of a Tom Mooney, a corner groceryman, a Kallikak, or a J. P. Morgan, nor narrowly at the mere biological preservation of them all, but at their collective rescue from the pitiable, fragmentary, self-divided, craft-idiotic, class-enslaved state in which they find themselves. It should aim, in short, at the transformation of human nature. It should make man dignified, integrated, complete, and free, so that the resources and potentialities that reside in him no less than in all other natural realms of this dialectical universe, may develop, expand, and find fruit-

ful expression. So much is evident from the Marxian criticism of the present. And obviously we have here the basis for a humanist ethics.

In these assertions, however, Marx and Engels see no more than an empty definition, or at most a pious hope, with no particular novelty attaching to it. If man ought to be what now he is not, and if history is responsible for men, then quite obviously history ought to be what now it is not. A flawless definition, this, but useless, they believe, for changing history. If one feels deeper allegiance to collective human kind than to nature, to God, or to attractive individuals, then of course one will take a humanistic view of history's proper end. This may be admirable ethical idealism, but it is no historical lever. What remains a blunt fact for them through anyone's recitation of humanist truisms, is that history is *not* made for such purposes.

Insofar as historical materialism is a call to action, then, a theory of revolution, not just a science of the past, Marx and Engels feel it as their central problem to show in practical steps rather than in mere ethical generalities, how what history is may in fact be translated into what history ought to be, how man, history's slave, may actually go about making himself history's master, thus advancing the transformation of his own nature in intended and collectively desired directions.

This problem, of course, neither Marx nor Engels supposes to be unique to historical materialism. In one guise or another it is as old as systematic thought itself. Confucius and Plato, Mohammed and Epicurus, Christ and Spinoza, Jefferson and Freud, all struggled with it, each in his own lights. Substantially, it is the problem of the better world, and of its human agencies. It is the problem of responsibility. It is the ethical problem, and for understanding it as such it will be well for us to refer it to a traditional reference frame.

From a standpoint of theoretical ethics it is analytically obvious that human responsibility has certain necessary conditions. One of them we have already touched on. Responsibility arises only in situations where the actual and the desired states are not identical, where things aren't what they ought to be: clearly men can-

not be enjoined to bring about that which already exists; "We ought to win the war," can be a moral injunction only so long as the war remains unwon. In Marx's and Engels' view there is clearly no question that this condition is abundantly fulfilled by their own problem: "Men ought to make good history and proper human nature," is a statement that calls for something not now, as they see it, existing, and to this extent it states for them a proper moral problem.

There is, however, another condition of human responsibility which raises greater difficulties. This is the fact that the word "ought" can have moral signification only when the state it calls for is within human power of achievement. "There ought to be proper medical care available to the poor," is a moral statement; "There ought not be any more stellar explosions," is not; the first is possible of human accomplishment, the second not. The important question here, then, is, does the issue at hand fulfill for Marx and Engels this second condition? Do they see it, in the last analysis, and consistently with their social theory in general, as actually within human power to make good history and to transform human nature? It is this that must be answered if we are to determine whether historical materialism states a truly moral problem, and whether its human being, whom we have seen in his biological, economic, social, class, and occupational status, is ultimately conceived by Marx and Engels to be also a responsible agent, or merely a passive sufferer in his own development.

Since Marx and Engels never put their thoughts on human responsibility into what, from a standpoint of conventional ethical procedure, could be called systematic form, our most promising method of approach will be to set forth the various theoretical possibilities for man's agency that obtain within their concrete diagnosis of the historical predicament, and to see how they regarded each of these possibilities. From the attitudes revealed a proper understanding of some of their own ethical conceptions can perhaps be generalized.

By way of diagnosis they have argued ³⁴⁹ that man has made

³⁴⁹ Above, pp. 147-9.

bad history because in the dialectics of production he has never been in a position to prevent the means of production from entering into destructive conflict with the relations of production, with human needs and their social organization. Preoccupied with competing for his own living, he has been unable to anticipate and control the long term historical and human consequences of his productive activities. Nature and technics have thus, through the property relations that crystallize about them, acted injuriously upon human nature rather than in satisfaction of its needs and in promotion of its proper development. History and human nature have thus emerged unplanned and unintended, not as products of human purpose, but as precipitates of conflicts of human purposes desired by no one, as inevitable consequences of class struggle.

Now it is clear enough that formal possibilities for human agency here are far from wanting. If the source of bad history has been lack of planning, then let men plan. If it has been individual egotism, narrow self-interest, producing conflicts of individual wills from which emerges something which no one willed, then let men examine and purify their hearts, let them think of the other fellow, let them collectivize their wills. If it is the means of production that are at fault, if technology, clashing with human relations of production, cripples social life, distorts "human natures" and produces anti-human history, then let human beings attack the problem through the machines, publicizing their dangers, halting them if necessary, abandoning them, or even destroying them before they destroy men. Finally, if the trouble lies in the relations of production, the fact that as classes men engage in internecine war rather than in mutual adjustment of competing group interests or voluntary submission of some classes to others, then let them end class conflict by whatever means will do it — by voting, court procedure, "peaceful evolution," bread and circuses or force.

In Marx's day as in ours, each of these four general proposals was put forward as a serious program by one or another school of thought; and each receives due consideration at some place in the Marxian writings.

The historical materialist position on planning we have already had occasion to consider at some length. Marx and Engels stand amongst its most articulate and vigorous proponents — they could not, they felt, as serious scientists do otherwise. Could anyone conscientiously deny that when men plan history instead of letting it occur fortuitously as it does at present, it will be better history? Its desirability, then, in their view, is beyond question. But its feasibility is another matter. Are any of the proponents of a scientific society, they ask, so powerful, or do they collectively possess such arts of persuasion, that the dominant classes will be brought to embark co-operatively upon an enterprise which will inevitably spell ruin for those special privileges which their total energies are, in fact, mobilized to maintain? The history of Utopias, they believed, from More, Bacon and Campanella to St. Simon, Fourier and Owen would dictate a negative answer⁸⁵⁰ even if economic logic did not.

The fact is, however, as they see it, that planlessness is of the very essence of capitalist economy, and to speak of social planning under capitalism is for them to speak in terms of ultimate incompatibles.⁸⁵¹ Indeed, not only capitalism but, Engels avers explicitly, "every society based on commodity production has the peculiarity that in it the producers have lost control of their own social relationships. Each produces for himself, with the means of production which happen to be at his disposal and in order to satisfy his individual needs through the medium of exchange. No one knows how much of the article he produces is coming onto the market, or how much demand there is for it; no one knows whether his individual product will meet a real need, whether he will cover his costs or even be able to sell it at all. Anarchy reigns in social production . . . compulsory laws of competition . . . assert themselves . . . apart from the producers and against the producers, as the natural laws of their form of production, working blindly. The product dominates

⁸⁵⁰ Cf. (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 21) Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, Op. Cit., Vol. I, p. 143.

⁸⁵¹ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, pp. 142, 1027; (II, 4, 6-7) Letter to Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 232. (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 281-96, 299-300, 305, 307-8, 327) Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 297-310, 314, 320, 323, 345; (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 704-6) *Dialectics of Nature*, pp. 294-6.

the producers.”⁸⁵² In other words, as Marx generalizes the difficulty, the regulating factor of production in any society is ultimately the working time at its disposal; in present society regulation is accomplished “not by the direct and conscious control of society over its working time . . . but by the movement of commodity prices.”⁸⁵³ It follows necessarily, as they understand the situation, that planning is impossible within the realm of capitalist ownership relations, that among “the capitalists themselves, complete anarchy reigns, since they face each other only as owners of commodities while the social interrelations of production manifest themselves to these capitalists only as an overwhelming natural law, which curbs their individual license.”⁸⁵⁴ The central contradiction of the present mode of production, the contradiction between planned or social production in the industrial establishments on the one hand, and capitalist or non-social appropriation on the other, thus necessarily reproduces itself, says Engels, as the “*antithesis between the organization of production in the individual factory and the anarchy of production in society as a whole.*”⁸⁵⁵

But, it may be objected, do not Marx and Engels, in diagnosing the cause of capitalist impotence in the realm of social planning, at the same time exhibit the cure? Given an understanding of the laws of competition and the movement of commodity prices that dominate him, will not the capitalist planner be able to dominate them instead?

No, reply Marx and Engels. In the first place, because of the limitation imposed on his possible spheres of understanding by his economic and class objectives, the bourgeois economist is incapable of even coming to an adequate *knowledge* of the total situation. His social science, “classical political economy,” says Engels, “is predominantly occupied only with the directly intended social effects of human actions connected with production and exchange. This fully corresponds to the social organization of which it is the theoretical expression. When individual

⁸⁵² (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 281–2) *Anti-Dühring*, p. 297.

⁸⁵³ (III, 4, 6–7) *Selected Correspondence*, p. 232.

⁸⁵⁴ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, p. 1027.

⁸⁵⁵ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 283) *Anti-Dühring*, p. 299.

capitalists are engaged in production and exchange for the sake of the immediate profit, only the nearest, most immediate results can be taken into account. . . . In relation to nature, as to society, the present mode of production is predominantly concerned only with the first, tangible success; and then surprise is expressed that the more remote effects of actions directed to this end turn out to be of quite a different, mainly even of quite an opposite, character.”³⁵⁶

In the second place, even if the capitalist planner were capable of encompassing the requisite knowledge, and even if he could transcend considerations of his own preferment, he would be quite helpless, Marx and Engels believe, in applying his knowledge in wide scale social planning, for every step of the application would militate against powerful vested interests, both individual and class, which would see to it either that he was removed from a position of agency or that he modified his plan to conform with the interests in question. “Mere knowledge,” says Engels, “even if it went much further and deeper than that of bourgeois economic science, is not enough to bring social forces under the control of society.”³⁵⁷ “To carry out this control requires something more. . . . It requires a complete revolution in our hitherto existing mode of production, and with it of our whole contemporary social order.”³⁵⁸ “What is above all necessary . . . is a social *act*” through which society “by taking possession of all means of production and using them on a planned basis,” frees “itself and all its members from the bondage in which they are at present held by these means of production which they themselves have produced but which now confront them as an irresistible extraneous force. . . .” Only, in short, under socialism, can there come an historical epoch when “man no longer merely proposes, but also disposes.”³⁵⁹ This is what Marx means when he says that “*No form of society can indeed prevent the fact that, one way or another, the working time at the disposal of society regulates production,*” and that only “un-

³⁵⁶ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 705-6) *Dialectics of Nature*, pp. 295-6.

³⁵⁷ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 327) *Anti-Dühring*, p. 345.

³⁵⁸ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 704) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 294.

³⁵⁹ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 327) *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 345-6.

der common ownership" can this regulation be accomplished "by the direct and conscious control of society over its working time."³⁶⁰

Planning, then, as Marx and Engels see it, is no answer to the historical problem — not because it is not desirable, but because, within a class-divided, commodity-producing society it is impossible of human accomplishment. Thus appeals to planning are not proper ethical appeals. Are we, then, to say of them that they are ethically neutral? It appears that in Marx's and Engels' view we can say no such thing. There are few things in the historical materialist universe that can claim ethical neutrality, and planning panaceas are certainly not amongst them. The social impact of such calls, Marx and Engels believe, may even on occasion be ethically positive — when, for example, their critical analyses of the present contribute to the enlightenment of the working class,³⁶¹ or when their general tenor and effect is to express and emphasize in a constructive way the desirability

³⁶⁰ *Selected Correspondence*, p. 232. That capitalists have been known to plan, have been known to forego competition for the sake of regulative co-operation, Marx of course does not deny. "During the period in which raw materials are high," he says for example, "the industrial capitalists get together in associations for the purpose of regulating production. So did they, for instance, after the rise of cotton prices in 1848, in Manchester, and a similar move was made in the production of flax in Ireland. But as soon as the immediate impulse has worn off, and the principle of competition reigns once more supreme, according to which one must 'buy in the cheapest market' . . . the regulation of the supply is left once more to 'prices.' All thought of a common, far-reaching, circumspect control of the production of raw materials gives way once more to the belief that demand and supply will mutually regulate one another. And it must be admitted that such control is on the whole irreconcilable with the laws of capitalist production, and remains forever a platonic desire or is limited to exceptional co-operation in times of great stress and helplessness." To this statement of Marx's, Engels appends an important historical footnote: "Since the above was written (1865)," he says, "competition on the world market has been considerably intensified by the rapid development of industry in all civilized countries, especially in America and Germany. The fact that the rapidly and enormously growing productive forces grow beyond the control of the laws of the capitalist mode of exchanging commodities, inside of which they are supposed to move, this fact impresses itself nowadays more and more even on the minds of the capitalists. This is shown especially by two symptoms. First, by the new and general mania for a protective tariff, which differs from the old protectionism especially by the fact that now the articles which are capable of being exported are the best protected. In the second place it is shown by the trusts of manufacturers of whole spheres of production for the regulation of production, and thus of prices and profits. It goes without saying that these experiments are practicable only so long as the economic weather is relatively favourable. The first storm must upset them and prove, that, although production assuredly needs regulation, it is certainly not the capitalist class which is fitted for that task. Meanwhile the trusts have no other mission but to see to it that the little fish are swallowed by the big fish still more rapidly than before." *Capital*, Vol. III, pp. 142-3.

³⁶¹ (I, 6, 554-5) *The Communist Manifesto*, Op. Cit., p. 238.

of scientific history as an eventual social goal.⁸⁶² But for the most part they will be actively *unethical*; they will confuse their goal for a program; they will misrepresent non-ethical (*i.e.*, unfeasible) injunctions for ethical (*i.e.*, feasible) ones, thus inviting numbers of people to canalize their various drives to effective action into useless allegiance to phantasms.⁸⁶³ In ultimate effect this may manifestly be as obstructive to a realization of the desired goal as positive and intended action against it. “. . . utopianism,” says Marx in a letter to Sorge, “which *before* the time of materialistic-critical socialism concealed the germs of the latter within itself, coming now *after* the event can only be silly — silly, stale and basically reactionary.”⁸⁶⁴ In short, whether the proponents of planning are well-intentioned men or vicious men appears to be ethically unimportant as Marx and Engels see it; their proposals, insofar as they rest on blindness to economic and social actualities, to the character of commodity production and the class-interest motivation of group action, will, by default if by nothing else, serve not social science, but the interests of the ruling class. Marx and Engels do not consider this to be ethical neutrality. On the contrary, with reference to the humanist objective, it represents not agency but constraint.

Since Marx and Engels themselves admit that planning is desirable — even essential, as a condition of the realization of their humanist objectives, the question of how it may be actually brought within the sphere of human agency becomes a central one. Two suggestions — apart from their own — have since their day commanded widespread popular consideration. The first, calling upon education to solve the problem, proposes that our future world citizenry be trained from earliest childhood in social, rather than class, mindedness, in “objective” (sometimes called “liberal”) rather than partisan behaviour, in foresight and the scientific attitude in matters societal, in short, in the art and science of collective living and historical planning. The second calls for “government by experts” — either as a temporary meas-

⁸⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 237–9; Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 147–55.

⁸⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶⁴ *Selected Correspondence*, p. 350.

ure until proper social education shall have become universal, or, after the Platonic manner, as a permanent arrangement. Basing its appeal on the indisputable fruitfulness of modern specialization — which Marx and Engels themselves repeatedly affirm — this argument today is apt to run somewhat as follows: since we do not entrust our surgery to whittlers, our cyclotrons to auto mechanics, why, then, do we lay our general human fortunes in the laps of such as Congressman Zilch or Senator Bilch? Let us leave government to governing experts and technicians, to specially trained social engineers, to competent planners and managers.

As Marx and Engels see it, neither of these proposals offers any practicable means for overcoming the central economic obstacle to planning, the necessarily competitive character of social relations within an economy based on private ownership and commodity production. Even if all men were successfully re-educated from competitiveness to co-operativeness, they believe, from anarchistic modes of thought to scientific ones, they would be unable to give social reality to these psychological configurations without first completely revolutionizing the economic base of society, for competition is the very motor of that economy. Unfortunately, moreover, such education is itself impossible so long as that base remains unrevolutionized; the circle as Marx and Engels saw it was vicious. It is not education, they maintain, that can transform the economic base, but only transformation of the economic base that can transform education. To pretend otherwise, they claim, is to misrepresent the actual, historical causal order. "What else does the history of ideas prove," asks *The Manifesto*, "than that intellectual production changes its character in proportion as material production is changed?"³⁶⁵ Even without history's evidence, common intelligence should, they believe, prove the point. If class division in the social realm is produced by the character of the economic base, and if the dominant classes in society dominate, as they clearly do, education itself along with all else, then obviously the configurations

³⁶⁵ (I, 6, 543-4) *Op. Cit.*, p. 225.

in question are ultimately functions of the mode of production, not vice versa.

In short, "The ideas of the ruling class," as *The German Ideology* phrases the matter, "are in every epoch the ruling ideas; i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the material means of production at its disposal, has at the same time control over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it."⁸⁶⁶ This is Marx's and Engels' summary way of pointing out that the major implements of education — schools, press, publishing houses, and, today, radio and cinema — are in fact controlled by the same classes which own and exploit for their own preferment the major instruments of production, and that, this being the case, it is nothing short of utopian to hope that education can be along any but ruling class lines. "The communists," they say, "have not invented the intervention of society in education; they do but seek to alter the character of that intervention, and to rescue education from the influence of the ruling class."⁸⁶⁷ Social mindedness, scientific objectivity in social planning will eventually, they are convinced, be achievable by education — but only when education shall have ceased to serve special interests, when teachers can hold their jobs, and textbooks their place in the curriculum even though their messages be subversive to the privileges of the classes in power. Since genuine social science, as they understand it, will always be subversive to special class privilege, it can never, they conclude, be developed in the schools of a class society, and to look to education alone to remedy an ailing history will always be utopian — hence, reactionary in social effect.

Of the second proposal, which today it has become fashionable to call managerial government, Marx and Engels feel it unnecessary to make much explicit criticism; it offers nothing requiring

⁸⁶⁶ (I, 5, 35) p. 39.

⁸⁶⁷ (I, 6, 542) *The Communist Manifesto*, Op. Cit., p. 224.

comment beyond the general consideration they gave to the subject of planning under capitalism. The current fruits of fascism's pretended achievements in social planning not only fail, ever more clearly, to refute the Marxian contention, but appear more and more to be Engels' "anarchy of society at large" on a wilder and more global scale than anything he himself imagined. Where there are classes, Marx and Engels never tired of insisting, government, whether it be by muddling politicians, skillful planners, or totalitarian dictators, will always serve ownership interests, and history will pay, as it is now paying, in blood and conflict. Thus the call for managers as governors, except under socialism, is by its very nature, they believe, the practical antithesis of proper history, of humanist democracy. Though it may be quite unconscious of its reactionary core, its practical realization would not serve social science as Marx and Engels understand it, but would merely furnish the dominant minority in society with a scientifically more exact technique than the old trial and error one, for exploiting the great majority.

From their views on education and planning as solutions to the historical predicament, it is already possible to come to some generalizations about Marx's and Engels' ethical attitudes. Ethics for them, quite obviously, is primarily a matter of practice. Just as human nature is to be judged by what men are and do rather than what they think themselves to be,⁸⁶⁸ so men's ethics are to be judged neither by the formal propriety of their precepts nor by the motives they profess, but by the chain of historical consequences which their thoughts and actions in fact inaugurate. If an ethical program is without positive, progressive effect, its effect is negative, and to this extent reactionary. Utopian panaceas, insofar as they divert the human energies of their adherents from genuinely constructive action, or mislead masses of people by arousing unrealizable hopes, are to this extent unethical, however much moral earnestness and humanistic fervour motivate their proponents.

These generalizations are confirmed by Marx's and Engels'

⁸⁶⁸ Marx, Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 356.

views on the next of the four types of "solution" to the historical problem which seemed to us to be theoretically possible. Not only do they deny, as would be expected, any real historical efficacy to programs of individual moral purification, to calls upon the conscience of mankind, to appeals to justice, human rights, equality, neighbourly or brotherly love, moral rearmament, god-guidance, and men of good will in government, but they lay upon such appeals with almost immoderate harshness. "Love," says Engels in at least one reference, is "cant."³⁶⁹ "Rights," Marx treats as an empty phrase;³⁷⁰ both of them regard the accepted idea of moral equality as a "popular prejudice."³⁷¹ Engels regards it as "really deeply superstitious of Lassalle that he should still believe in 'the idea of justice.'"³⁷² Marx speaks of twaddle about justice and has little patience with those who invoke it.³⁷³ Engels polemicizes against "'true love of humanity' and empty phraseology about 'justice,'"³⁷⁴ and Marx attacks the "higher ideal" type of socialism which wants "to replace its materialistic basis . . . by modern mythology with its goddesses of Justice, Freedom, Equality and Fraternity."³⁷⁵ They deny explicitly that communists preach morality and their strictures against those who inveigh against egotism or demand that we love one another are at times so vigorous that timid readers conjure visions of the anti-Christ, and the idea is critically advanced with textual support that historical materialism is not only no ethics but anti-ethical.

The reason for this particular strain of polemics was not, in fact, that Marx and Engels were deficient in moral consciousness, but on the contrary, as is evident when one reads the texts with any care and searchingness, that they had too much of it to tolerate the hypocrisy or stupidity of lip service. The abuses of their society had produced a Europe-wide rash of ethical re-

³⁶⁹ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Op. Cit.*, p. 449.

³⁷⁰ *Critique of the Gotha Program, Selected Works*, Vol. II, *passim*.

³⁷¹ (I, Sonderausgabe, 111) *Anti-Duhring*, p. 116. Cf. Marx's further strictures in *Critique of the Gotha Program*, and in (I, 6, 186-7) *Poverty of Philosophy*, pp. 100-1.

³⁷² (III, 2, 47) Letter to Marx, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 128.

³⁷³ (III, 4, 340) Letter to Engels *Selected Correspondence*, p. 293.

³⁷⁴ Letter to a group of German Social Democrats, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 375.

³⁷⁵ Letter to Sorge, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 350.

formism, and the energies of the working class whose members, as we shall see, were in their view to be the human agents of a realistic program, were emasculated or misdirected and confused by any number of plausible but basically visionary counter-programs.⁸⁷⁶ It was this, not ethics, moral responsibility, genuinely humanist equalitarianism or real justice that Marx and Engels were attacking in their attacks on ethical idealism. In practical effect these reformist programs, often motivated by the noblest sentiments and most sincerely humanitarian and progressive sympathies, were, Marx and Engels believed, by virtue of their utopianism and the large numbers of people they immobilized from effective action, reactionary, supporters of the status quo, and hence, from the historical materialist standpoint, unethical.

The third "solution" to the social problem, the technological one, has come to be associated with the term "machine-wrecking." Sometimes it calls for action of varying degrees of severity against the already existing technology as being chiefly responsible for the condition of barbarism and brutality into which society has descended; sometimes it asks merely for a temporary shelving of all further technological activity, for a "moratorium on science," so that man's morality, sociality and religion will have a chance to "catch up" to his scientific attainments.

Machine-wrecking, whether religio-moral in expression, whether romantically nostalgic and feudophile as with the French writer Duhamel, whether non-co-operative and political after the manner of Gandhi and the return-to-the-spinning-wheel cult, or whether actually mob-violent as in the case of the Luddite movement of Marx's century and similar ones of ours, is of ancient lineage. According to an old Italian source which Marx quotes, it appears that as early as 1540 the town council of Danzig, fearing the social consequences of a newly invented weaving machine, had it destroyed "and the inventor secretly strangled or drowned."⁸⁷⁷ Marx comments on numerous popular protests and governmental prohibitions against this and other

⁸⁷⁶ E.g., those of Feuerbach, Proudhon, Dühring, and the "True Socialists" as well as the traditional Owenism, St. Simonism, etc.

⁸⁷⁷ *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 467.

machines during the seventeenth century, and shows that the eighteenth is marked by large scale popular machine-breaking riots.

Although, generally speaking, Marx passes a vigorously negative judgment on all forms of machine-wrecking, he did feel that in these very early instances of it, there were perhaps present some elements of positive value. These outbursts did in historical fact, he claims, represent spontaneous working class protests against working class conditions of life; thus they both contributed to the development of working class consciousness and called widespread attention to the seriousness of the social disease, and for these progressive effects some positive ethical evaluation must be given them. Insofar, however, as their major impact was to misdirect working class energies, focussing them, and public notice, on the machines instead of on the system of ownership relations which permitted the abuse of these machines, they were, he claims, seriously reactionary, hence seriously unethical. "It took both time and experience," he says however, in partial extenuation of these early machine wreckers, "before the workers could learn to distinguish between machinery itself and its employment by capital, and to direct their attacks, not against the material instruments of production, but against the particular social form in which these instruments are used."⁸⁷⁸

In general, however, and in its later manifestations, Marx and Engels believed, machine-wrecking is altogether reactionary, derelict, and unethical. In their view machines, technological progress, are not only inevitable but also ethically desirable. Where nature is niggardly, machines alone can bring about the economy of abundance which is a presupposition of a truly humanist society; machines alone, Marx and Engels never tired of pointing out, can provide the universal satisfaction of basic human wants and the opportunities for time free from necessary subsistence-getting activities that are pre-conditions for the wider development of human resources. The actual historical effect of machine-wrecking, then, Marx and Engels saw as trebly un-

⁸⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 468.

ethical: first, because it is utopian — technological advance cannot be stayed; second, because, as Marx puts it, it furnishes, by the violence it does to legal property rights, the pretext for “forcible and extremely reactionary measures against the working class;”⁸⁷⁹ and third, because it is in all respects against the long run interests of “better history” and better “human nature.”

This leaves for consideration the last of the four theoretical possibilities for human agency in the improvement of men and history, the one that finds the source of evil neither in technology, original sin, or the unplannedness of social development, but in the class character of post gentile social life, in the *relations* of production that have underlain human association. For resolving the social and historical predicament at this level, there are probably almost as many distinct theoretical proposals as there have been political parties on the continent since Marx's day. Many of them have been “Marxist” in origin or profession, a consideration, amongst others, which once led Marx to the famous statement that he himself was no “Marxist.”

A large portion of the enormous literary output of both Marx and Engels, but particularly of Marx, is devoted to polemic against, critical analysis of, and corrective comment upon the various political programs of their time, for since they themselves found in politics the answer to the historical problem, they were apt to regard the hostile or even misdirected use of this potent lever as of far greater ethical importance than any amount of utopian scheming at the level of education, technology, individual morality, or social planning. Since it is obviously out of the question here to document and systematize precisely their conception of deviations between, say, anarchism and state absolutism, from what they believed to be genuinely ethical political theory and practice in relation to their humanist goal,⁸⁸⁰ let us

⁸⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸⁰ In general they thought that the particular programs which stood in competition with their own all erred by failing to provide effectively for the abolition of classes themselves. Conflict between classes, they believed, could not be ended in any other manner. Equally utopian appeared to them to be proposals to suppress class struggle from above by judicious variations of the club-and-carrot method of dealing with the lower classes, to suffocate it with good will at the middle by “class-cooperationism,” and to vote or terrorize it out of existence from below by “parliamentary socialist” or “anarchist” techniques. The fact that rightists usually wanted to crystallize

be content merely to illustrate this phase of their critical commentaries by a single and arbitrary example.

Mediaevalism, or neo-Feudalism is a political phenomenon perhaps as suitable as any for our purposes; not only is it still amongst us, but, appearing in such early critics of bourgeois capitalism as Philip Massinger and Sir Thomas More, it even antedates Marx and Engels by a matter of some centuries. Today its influence appears in such diverse milieux as Gandhi India, the University of Chicago and St. John's College, the Roman Catholic Church, American philosophical neo-Thomism, Guild Socialism, Franco Spain, Southern Agrarianism, and the scattered Royalist movements which perennially gad-fly European politics. In Marx's time mediaevalism even donned proletarian apparel and learned the language of socialism, and though Marx and Engels claim that the people were not fooled, that "they saw on its hindquarters the old feudal coat of arms, and deserted with loud and irreverent laughter," they nonetheless deemed it sufficiently important to devote a section ³⁸¹ of *The Manifesto* to it.

"Half lamentation, half lampoon," they called it in their day; "half echo of the past, half menace of the future; at times, by its bitter, witty and incisive criticism striking the bourgeoisie to the very heart's core, but always ludicrous in its effect, through total incapacity to comprehend the march of modern history. . . ." ³⁸² With varying degrees of innocence, indirection, or overt admiration this political philosophy points to the Middle Ages as a model of social harmony and class co-operation, and agitates for a return to the mediaeval pattern. Even today it is apt, where its partisanship is overt, to attack bourgeois capitalism with all the vigour of leftist radicalism, and, as Marx and Engels put it, to wave "the proletarian alms-bag in front for a banner," but it nonetheless makes its alliances with other parties of the extreme

class division for the sake of entrenching hierarchical privileges, and leftists for the most part wanted the division ended for the sake of people in general, did not enter the Marxian picture as an ethical factor. The degree of "rightness" of a political program had nothing to do with the relative abstract merits of its motivating principle, but merely with the extent to which its actual consequences hastened or postponed the ultimate and necessary demise of the moribund bourgeoisie and the realization of a classless society.

³⁸¹ III, 1, a.

³⁸² (I, 6, 547) *The Communist Manifesto, Op. Cit.*, pp. 229-230.

right — nationalist, racist, Catholic, corporative and fascist. Both historically true, Marx and Engels would admit, and ethically appealing to men of good will and romantic disposition is its central thesis, that the modern social cancer, the destructive conflict between labour and capital, bourgeois and proletarian did not exist in feudal society. But the corrective it proposes is, as they see it, both absurd and vicious, sentimental and reactionary. In the first place, they point out,³⁸³ the feudal mode of exploitation, though different from the bourgeois mode, was just as real, and if no proletariat existed, serfdom did. Moreover, they claim, feudalism itself produced the modern bourgeois class, and hence inevitably produced the modern conflict; thus, as they see it, one cannot desire feudalism as a "solution" to the historical problem without desiring, by the same token, a recurrence of the same problem, for the bourgeois-proletarian struggle is feudalism's own fruit.

The essential utopianism of the mediaevalist mentality, however, rests, according to Marx and Engels, not on any peculiarities of the feudal regime, but on the idea that it is possible actually to recreate *any* pattern of the past. The essence of historical process, they believe, is the dialectical, that is irreversible, development and expansion of that productive base on which all social, cultural, and political superstructure rests. Can this development go into reverse gear, unwind itself so to speak? Never has it done so, they believe. Though there have been periods of pause, and though isolated individuals or groups have taken up with one or another form of subsistence-acquiring primitivism, no peoples as such, it is their firm conviction, has ever renounced its historically developed mode of production in favor of an antiquated one.³⁸⁴ To make serious proposal, therefore, that modern men return to the mediaeval social, political, and cultural pattern appears from their standpoint as vicious and reactionary, for in the nature of things it can only be to demand the arbitrary political or military imposition of a feudal social and state structure upon a bourgeois capitalist productive society. This, of

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

³⁸⁴ Cf. Marx, Letter to Annenkov, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 8.

course, adds up not to feudalism, but to what Marxists today call fascism — that is, bourgeois dominance in a class hierarchy sustained by naked force.⁸⁸⁵

We have seen enough of Marx's and Engels' earnest criticism of non-Marxian programs to realize that, though they themselves were not ethicists in the conventional formal sense, the practical problem of human agency was decidedly not one which they were disposed to treat lightly. And they would be quick to af-

⁸⁸⁵ Recent history, one is tempted to observe, gives some force to this diagnosis; in Spain, for example, the monarchist parties acquired, and seem not unduly dissatisfied, neither Juan nor a Carlist claimant, but Franco; in France, neither a Bonaparte nor the Comte de Paris, but Laval; in Italy, neither Umberto nor even sovereignty for Emmanuel, but Mussolini; and in Germany the Hohenzollern hopefuls have been spilling their irreplaceable blood with obvious willingness for Hitler.

Since the concept of fascism receives no specific treatment in the writings of Marx and Engels, it might seem an irrelevance to introduce it here. But so important is the actual phenomenon in the history of our times, that failure to focus it within the historical materialist reference frame, at least descriptively, would constitute a sin of omission.

Following the basic pattern drawn by Plato, though departing from it according to many exigencies of the hour, the fascist "solution" to the class struggle problem as delineated by Marx and Engels aims not at the elimination of classes but at their crystallization, seeks not to abolish the causes of the conflict between them, but to suppress that conflict. The theoretical weaknesses of fascism are implicitly if not explicitly stated in the Marxian writings, but at this historical juncture, when history is being so manifestly martyred by fascist programs for "improving" her, it would be pedantic to repeat these criticisms. Within Marxian theory, for example, fascism and imperialist war are mutually implicative, but in the face of today's facts, no theoretical buttressing is needed to establish their actual affinity. Our account of the Marxian interpretation of fascism may therefore limit itself to the purely descriptive level.

Fascism, as modern Marxists define it, is the open and naked and terroristic dictatorship, substituted for the disguised and "parliamentary" and "legalistic" *de facto* sovereignty and rule of the bourgeoisie — but not of the bourgeois class as a whole. As free capital enterprise follows its normal development into monopoly capitalism, and as monopoly capitalism slips from the control of industrial capital and is absorbed by finance capital, larger and larger sections of the bourgeoisie cease in fact to be owners, cease, economically speaking, to belong to the class with which they have become socially identified. Socially still members of the bourgeoisie, they are, economically speaking, proletarians; economically speaking, their interests stand in actual opposition to the new, highly concentrated ownership interests and, basically, in conjunction with those of other wage workers. Thus, objectively, the Marxian conditions for the revolutionary denouement of the capitalist system are at hand. Subjectively, however, the new wage workers fail to recognize clearly the historic implications of their declassment; they still think of themselves as bourgeoisie, and thus remain capable, in the class struggle, of having their energies of discontent misdirected against the traditional working class opponent instead of against the true class antagonist of both — the finance capitalist. It is the task of fascism to make actuality of this possibility, to employ middle-class confusion for the purpose of turning the tables of historical movement, of arresting the transition to socialism. Thus it is, according to Marxian interpretation, that although fascism climbs to power on the backs of the middle class, it represents, when there, not the interests of the social bourgeoisie as a whole against the workers, but of the economic bourgeoisie — a small remaining ultra-reactionary, ultra-imperialist segment of that formerly great class — against the rest of the population.

firm that if the only possibilities for action were the foregoing ones, then their own call for better history and the improvement of human nature would be quite as empty of ethical signification as an injunction against the recurrence of stellar explosions or tidal waves. None of the programs examined appears to them able to bring the humanist goal within the realm of possible accomplishment by men. Their formal flawlessness Marx and Engels probably saw as a measure of their material emptiness; in any case they called them idealistic. The holocausts of modern times, they would undoubtedly assert, are a good material measure of their impotence; for such reasons they called them utopian. And they identified idealism, utopianism, because of their obstructiveness to effective action, with ethical constraint, with patience: the planner, the educator, the moral reformer, the machine wrecker, the neo-feudalist, the class-collaborationist, the anarchist and fascist — these, they believed, are not free men; they are not agents, but patients; hallucinated by social unrealities, they cannot enact their history, cannot create their human natures, they can but suffer them.

Freedom, per contra, is, for Marx and Engels, true social knowledge. Herein, they believed, as we may now proceed to see, suffering stops, action begins.

CHAPTER XI

Agency: Science

THE RESPONSIBLE AGENT, as Marx and Engels see him, differs from the "unfree" men we have been discussing in two ways: knowing what is impossible, he severs his will from all attachment to it; understanding what is necessary, he identifies his total action with necessity; freedom is his reward for becoming, himself, necessary.

Marx and Engels thus regard even man's negative science, his knowledge of what he cannot do, as a part of his positive emancipation: he is freed by it from the constraint which lies in the misdirection of energy and hope. But it is his positive ethical science, as they see it, his knowledge of what constitutes effectual action, that fully frees him. When he fully understands and accepts the fact that history can become truly human history only when classes cease to struggle; when he realizes that classes, by their very nature, can cease to struggle only when classes cease to be; when he concludes, therefore, to the basic principle of thought and action that there can be but one ethical course to follow — that which will eventuate most directly and with the greatest dispatch in the total elimination of class division from society — then, they believe, he is fully free.

The reasoning here is properly persuasive. But this alone of course, does not qualify it as proper *ethical* reasoning. We are concerned with whether the Marxian agent, in contrast with the followers of one or another utopian program, is truly responsible and free — that is, is truly an agent. This will depend in part at least on whether Marx and Engels can offer adequate grounds for believing that it is actually within his power to accomplish what they believe he *ought* to accomplish. They must show, in short, that their call for a classless society differs both from utopian appeals and from injunctions against such things as stellar explosions, tidal waves and earthquakes, by falling within the realm of possible human achievement.

From the vantage point of this formulation of the problem, the

whole literature of "scientific socialism" may be regarded as Marx's and Engels' effort to demonstrate the feasibility of successful revolutionary practice, and thus to affirm human agency within the historical materialist universe. They are predominantly concerned with the delineation of the cause of the phenomenon which they want changed by human intervention (*i.e.*, class division), and with exploration of the techniques and methods whereby the obstacles to direct manipulation of that cause may be overcome.

The cause, as Marx and Engels display it, is simple enough; it is merely the discriminative ownership of the means of production of the common livelihood. But the problem of dealing directly with that cause is a rather more complicated matter: to any frontal assault on the institution of private property there are all manner of concrete obstacles. Central to all appears to be the existence of the present owning class. The bourgeoisie Marx and Engels regard as the sole remaining beneficiary of the institution in question; they assume that the bourgeoisie is committed to the bitter end to its maintenance; and, in the last analysis, they view all the other obstacles — political, legal, educational and juridical institutions, police, military and economic power, religious commandments, moral conventions and ideologies, propaganda walls, and even fifth column activity within the ranks of the attackers — as merely constituting bourgeois defenses in depth. Voluntary abdication of the bourgeoisie they felt to be quite out of the question; clearly the class must be forced to abdicate. To put an end to private property by forcibly abolishing the power of the bourgeoisie thus emerges as the strategic objective of the historical materialist plan for a classless society.

Before we inquire what means Marx and Engels claim to have discovered for accomplishing this, we will obviously want to know what guarantees there are, if any, that it would eventuate in realization of the particular goal desired — that is, a classless society. Indeed, one of the criticisms most frequently brought against Marxism advances what it claims to be a decisive reason *a priori* why it *could* not. The dialectic itself, it urges, could not possibly sing its swan song to communism. The synthesis of

present conflict could do no more, by dialectical necessity, than create its own antithesis; the negation of the negation would have to negate itself. Concretely, the very dialectic which might "bring" communism, must by the same token end it, giving rise, as it always has in the past, to new social conflict, new "classes."

In this "a priori" form, its most common one, the argument from dialectics rests clearly enough on a fundamental misconception of Marx's and Engels' own thought. They themselves had no notion of a *dialectique créatrice*. True, they do employ the terminology of dialectics in a manner that is sometimes reminiscent of Hegel's idealistic use of it. They even on occasion, when they have their arguments materially "in the box," so to speak, quite obviously indulge improperly in flights of forensic formalism. But the fact remains that their own dialectical theory is materialist, not idealist. This means as we have had frequent occasion to observe,⁸⁸⁸ that, in their ultimate understanding of it, the dialectic "creates" nothing, "brings about" nothing, *is* nothing, in fact. Not in itself an entity, but merely the formal structure of material processes whose particular content, direction and tempo can be determined only by empirical examination and not by deduction from dialectical categories, the dialectic no more brings about or ends communism than it brought about or ended feudalism — or, to consider a realm of process where, as they saw it, its formal pattern is equally manifest, than it brings about water when ice is melted and vapour when water is boiled. Here the agencies are chemical and thermodynamic, there, social; in both cases the process proves dialectical, but the result is not the cause.

But even where the dialectical "refutation" invokes no metaphysical idealism to establish its case for Marxian inconsistency, it makes another assumption that is equally foreign to Marx's and Engels' view of things. They themselves, unlike the utopian socialists, never for a moment envision communist stasis, and yet the charge of inconsistency rests wholly on the notion that they do. They promise a very great amount of good from commu-

⁸⁸⁸ *F.g.*, above, pp. 7 ff, 36 ff, 111 f.

nism, and even make it the terminal point for striving in this current stage of history, but nowhere in the texts that I have been able to discover, do they ever commit the utopianism of regarding it as perfect, permanent, or in any other way millennial. They claim merely these things: (a) that common ownership of the means of production is on the way and will be realized; (b) that this stage of society will be classless because this is what is *meant* by common ownership of the means of production (if people or groups continue to compete with one another the struggle will not be class struggle); (c) that this stage of society will approximate more closely a humanist democracy than the present stage. Nowhere do they pretend beyond this. Always they speak of classless socialism as the *next* stage, not the *final* stage of history, and everywhere they imply, and frequently explicitly assert, the impossibility of any social or historical finality. Both constantly polemicize against what Engels calls "all conceptions of final, absolute truth and of a final absolute state of humanity corresponding to it." Nothing for them "is final, absolute, sacred." History, says Engels categorically, hereby dotting the i's of the matter beyond argument, can never "reach a perfected termination in a perfect, ideal condition of humanity . . . a perfect society, a perfect 'state,' are things which can only exist in imagination. On the contrary, all successive historical situations are only transitional stages in the endless course of development of human society from the lower to the higher. Each stage . . . must give way to a higher form which will also in its turn decay and perish."⁸⁸⁷ While there is undoubtedly more than a touch of apriorist rhetoric in the phrasing of this passage — Engels was guilty oftener than Marx — it would seem in any case to leave no room for millennialism in historical materialist speculations on the socialist condition of man.

Theoretically, then, there would seem to be no particular impediment to socialism within materialist dialectics. But this is far from proving that there is room for classlessness within historical reality. Still granting that Marx and Engels may perhaps be able

⁸⁸⁷ *Ludwig Feuerbach, Op. Cit.*, pp. 421-2.

to establish a case for the feasibility of bourgeois overthrow, we nevertheless have yet to be shown their concrete reasons for believing that abolition of that particular class would effect the abolition of classes in general. How, for example, specifically, are they to explain the fact that the abolition of the feudal aristocracy did not result in a classless society some hundreds of years ago?

Marx and Engels rest their answer to this on two concrete facts with reference to which, they hold, our present epoch is radically distinguished from the feudal epoch — and, indeed, from all epochs of the past. On the one hand, it has socialized its production;³⁸⁸ on the other, it has simplified its class structure by the dissolution of multiple class distinctions into the central one of bourgeoisie-proletariat.³⁸⁹ It is precisely because of these differences, they maintain, that, on the one hand, the death of aristocracy could not possibly have been the birth of socialism, and, on the other, the liquidation of the present ruling class can *only* mean the end of all class distinctions whatsoever. Their reasoning in support of this contention has been partly exhibited earlier (Chapter VIII), but for the sake of the present ethical point, it will be well to glance at it in full.

Social revolution hitherto, Marx and Engels have maintained, has always in historical fact effected the transfer of ownership from the non-producing class to the actual labouring producing class; thus, for example, the lowly burghers of the middle ages, became with the liquidation of the feudal aristocracy, the mighty bourgeoisie. But hitherto, they also show, production itself, along with ownership and appropriation, has been private and individual in character, and the transfer in question was in effect merely the transfer of ownership from one set of private individuals to another. The result — to answer the specific question posed above — has inevitably been that new producing classes (*e.g.*, the proletariat) have always arisen to compete with the new private owners (*e.g.*, the bourgeoisie), and class struggle

³⁸⁸ Cf. above, pp. 108 ff.

³⁸⁹ (I, 6, 526) *The Communist Manifesto, Op. Cit.*, pp. 205–6. Cf. above, note 239, pp. 114–15.

has continued to be at the same time history's affliction and its motor.

The essential difference between this situation and the modern one is delineated by Marx as follows: "The transformation of scattered private property arising from individual labour [*i.e.*, feudal private property] into capitalist private property is, naturally, a process incomparably more protracted, violent, and difficult than the transformation of capitalist private property, already in fact resting on socialized production, into socialized property. In the former case, we had the expropriation of the mass of the people by a few usurpers; in the latter, we have the expropriation of a few usurpers by the mass of the people."⁸⁹⁰ In other words, today, in contrast to the feudal era, the producing class, the proletariat, does not consist of privately producing individuals. Thanks to the technological expansion which capitalism has contributed to the movement of society toward humanist socialism, production is no longer private, individual, and meager, but — concentrated in the great industrial establishments — has become social, collective, and plethoric. In view of this it seems to Marx and Engels a clear conclusion that the current conflict which, like all previous ones, will eventually confer ownership of the means of production on the actual producers, can do so only socially and collectively. Private property will be ended, as they see it, because no class interests will any longer demand it and all human interests will stand opposed to it, or, in other words, because since the only remaining class, the proletariat, produces socially and collectively, there will be no private producers, as in times past, to inherit it. Thus, in the Marxian view, will the dissolution of the bourgeoisie be synonymous with the dissolution of all class distinctions: where there is no discriminative property ownership, there can, as was shown in the case of the gentile system, be no classes (*supra*, p. 114); common ownership of the means of production of the common livelihood will again be the historical actuality, and with production now technologically capable of an economy of abundance, history and human nature can at last become products

⁸⁹⁰ *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 837.

of human science and intent rather than by-products of class struggle.³⁹¹

It is evident that with this view of the situation Marx and Engels are in effect putting their agents in a better position than is actually required by the exigencies of ethics; clearly they are envisioning not merely the *possibility* of a classless society, but, given the defeat of the bourgeoisie, its *necessity*. The Marxian revolutionary agent may manifestly no more suffer doubts concerning the incidence of socialism upon the overthrow of bourgeois rule than medical practitioners may question the amelioration of scurvy upon the administration of vitamin C. And while, from the standpoint of empirical science, a larger element of faith must necessarily compensate for the absence of precedent experiments, they view this element as neither metaphysical nor religious in character, but rather as of the calculative kind that governs all scientific expectations. Admitting that the cultural and ideological accoutrements of the new society could not be foreseen — he would not “write recipes for future cookshops” — Marx himself asserts that the material transformation of the economic conditions of its production “can be determined with the precision of a natural science.”³⁹²

The introduction of this “necessity” concept is, of course, certain to raise questions relative to the true character of the “freedom” with which historical materialism endows its agents. It will be profitable, however, to defer consideration of this problem for a later context, where similar issues arise for it is not yet enough for Marx and Engels to have shown the identity, within their theory, of classlessness and communal ownership, and the necessary incidence of communal ownership upon the overthrow of bourgeois rule. They must show further why they believe that the overthrow of bourgeois rule is itself possible of accomplishment.

What of this question, then? How, according to Marx and Engels, is a human agent, desirous of a classless society, to set about eliminating the bourgeoisie? Does he get out his bomb and

³⁹¹ (1, *Sonderausgabe*, 294) Cf. *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 309–10.

³⁹² Preface to *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 356.

butcher knife in the hope of physically removing the class, individual by individual, from the social scene? Or is the correct attack through the private property which supports the bourgeoisie as a class? Is the Marxist to plunder their individual resources, make off with their cash and jewels, submit their immovable goods to arson? These, of course, are anarchist, not historical materialist techniques. If Carlyle's great men can have but small place in Marx's and Engels' history, individual acts of terrorism and violence can have even less in their ethics; with their rejection of the "genius theory" goes also, naturally, that of the "devil theory."

But they by no means advocated treating the enemy kindly. This they would have considered leaving the anarchist skillet for the "collaborationist" stew pot. Gentle dealings with the bourgeoisie, they believed, will never defeat the bourgeoisie; peace will not win wars, even class wars; and the ballot box, while a powerful weapon in the conflict, is merely a tactical adjunct — only in the rarest cases capable of being strategically decisive. No, on the contrary, they seek no escape from the conflict because it seems altogether evident to them that no escape is possible so long as the bourgeoisie is committed to defending, even to the point of force and violence, the restrictive as opposed to the communal ownership of the means of production. It seems to be somewhat along these lines of reasoning, then, that active pursuance of the class struggle became for Marx and Engels the method which historical materialist ethics must impose on its human agents.

One is bound to wonder, of course, how such an injunction can be reconciled with the Marxian conception of class struggle as an *obstacle* to the desired state of human kind. Marx and Engels have shown beyond doubt that in their view of the social scene since the demise of the primitive commune, it is class struggle and class struggle alone that has corrupted history, that has enslaved man, that has withheld his fate from his own hands and wrought of him that thwarted, meager, fragmentary and distorted being which biology needs perjure itself to call human. Why, then, will they have any dealing with it?

Because they must, they say. While this is all too true of class struggle, their science of society has indicated that it is nonetheless class struggle and class struggle alone that can end class struggle itself. Has it not been, since the decline of gentile society, the lever of all historical transformation — and thus, in this sense, not the corruptor but the progressive factor in history? At this particular juncture, they argue, when the bourgeoisie is all that stands in the way of classlessness, and hence the end of struggle, it can only emerge as the instrument of its own destruction. Clearly, to advocate opposition to, or even abstention from it would be, they feel, to renounce the sole means of realizing their humanist goal. They must welcome the struggle. They must enjoin their agents to undertake it wholeheartedly, to lead it in fact, to press it with unremitting intelligence, realism, constancy and discipline in all of its phases and through all of its forms — ideological, agitational, economic, then revolutionary, and finally repressive — until such a victory has been won for the forces of progress as can no longer be contested by those of reaction.

This, then, appears to be the practical understanding of the history-changing role of class struggle that led Marx and Engels, although they avowed consummate hatred for it, to become its most articulate champions and most uncompromising militants. It is the concrete means, they believed, and *the only existing means*, by which man's history and human destiny can be brought within man's power. It is not an easy means, they admitted, but the road of history they saw was steep, and they claimed no magic carpet.

That man must fight, that there is no hope of human liberation without fight, is thus the very essence, the central command of historical materialist ethics — a fact which, as we shall later see, is as rationally intolerable to the "free-will" school of ethicists as it is startling and unsavory to those whose conception of obligation has been forged in the Kantian-Christian-bourgeois-democratic tradition of personalized equalitarianism. The former sees in the deterministic rigours of historical materialism no more than an inevitable denouement which requires no human

action and makes injunctions to it meaningless. The latter sees in this ethics of pugnacity and partisanship no genuine ethics at all: both war and favouritism are repugnant to its whole set of concepts. But again, for the sake of present coherence in the account of the general Marxian argument, we will defer such problems for later consideration.

If historical materialism is to pretend to any ethics at all, Marx and Engels must do more than merely sound their battle cry. Even if it be admitted that successful revolution may well again, as heretofore, confer ownership on the actual producers, that the past in this respect may be indicative of the future, can it be so in respect to revolution itself? Do the successes of past revolutions guarantee those to come? Clearly not. Clearly neither the dialectic nor God will succour the proletariat; only the strength the exploited class is able to command can decide its fate in its favour. Can Marx and Engels show that its chances are more than middling, that its efforts are capable of being more than a vengeful suicide? To meet the requirements of ethics they must show that they have reasonable grounds for believing victory to be possible.

And here again, as is well known, they essay far more than they need. In proving the chance for success, they exclude, at least within the confines of their premises, the possibility of failure — and open themselves thereby to as serious ethical questioning as deficient proofs would have done. Their demonstration is a matter of such general knowledge that only a summary statement of it is needed here. They show that the movement of capitalist accumulation is monopolistic. They paint what this tends to mean in terms of classes: rapid depletion of bourgeois ranks, and growth to immense proportions of the army of dispossessed — a process at the same time producing, and itself being hastened by, the periodic disequilibrium between production and consumption, the ever more catastrophic inability of modern society to utilize what it has made — in short, the crises of current economy. Some of their writings of the 1840's seem almost clairvoyant in their descriptive appropriateness to the nineteen-thirties, whose memory, though unlamented, is scarcely

stale. "It is enough to mention," warns *The Manifesto*,³⁹³ "the commercial crises that by their periodical return put the existence of the entire bourgeois society on its trial, each time more threateningly. In these crises a great part not only of the existing products, but also of the previously created productive forces, are periodically destroyed. In these crises there breaks out an epimedic that, in all earlier periods, would have seemed an absurdity—the epidemic of overproduction. Society suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if a famine, a universal war of devastation had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence; industry and commerce seem to be destroyed. And why? . . . The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them. And how does the bourgeoisie get over these crises? On the one hand, by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones. That is to say, by paving the way for more extensive and more destructive crises, and by diminishing the means whereby crises are prevented. The weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself."

That the bourgeoisie cannot possibly escape being felled by its own weapons, seems to Marx and Engels an inescapable conclusion: precisely because of these ever more frequent and ever more devastating crises of overproduction, ever greater numbers of smaller owners must give up their properties and become wage-earners, ever greater numbers of smaller wage-earners must lose their livelihood and become unemployed, while ever smaller numbers of the bourgeoisie are left to appropriate their ever smaller class-sustaining profits. What possible hope, they ask, can there be for the bourgeoisie as a class? And they answer, none.

History has shown that, temporally speaking, Marx and Engels, in the optimism of initiating battle, generally underestimated bourgeois staying powers; but that history has proved their insights inappropriate it clearly is not possible yet to claim.

Although the bourgeoisie has devised expedients that Marx and Engels did not anticipate for staving off the nemesis they threatened for it, it is nevertheless genuinely doubtful whether they would be confounded by the present. They did not, in fact, set dates, or rigid revolutionary schedules. They foresaw the possibility — the inevitability, rather, of repeated concessions, of ingenious artifices for bourgeois retrenchment, including, though not fascism, at least many of its methods and their ultimate ineffectuality, and including, though not the present war, at least the last one with chances for more to come. In a miracle of cookshop canniness, long before the days of world wars, the audacious Engels wrote a recipe for World War I that is startling in its precision. Three decades before it occurred, and with little precedent to go on, Engels assured Europe that, for Prussia-Germany, “no war is any longer possible . . . except a world war and a world war of an extension and violence hitherto undreamt of. Eight to ten millions of soldiers will mutually massacre one another and in doing so devour the whole of Europe until they have stripped it barer than any swarm of locusts has ever done. The devastations of the Thirty Years War compressed into three or four years, and spread over the whole continent; famine, pestilence, general demoralization both of the armies and of the mass of the people produced by acute distress; hopeless confusion of our artificial machinery in trade, industry and credit, ending in general bankruptcy; collapse of the old states and their traditional state wisdom to such an extent that crowns will roll by dozens on the pavement and there will be nobody to pick them up; absolute impossibility of foreseeing how it will all end and who will come out of the struggle as victor; only one result absolutely certain: general exhaustion and the establishment of the conditions for the ultimate victory of the working class. . . . This, my lords, princes and statesmen, is where in your wisdom you have brought old Europe. And when nothing more remains to you but to open the last great war dance — that will suit us all right. The war may push us temporarily into the background, may wrench from us many a position already conquered. But when you have unfettered forces which you will then no longer

be able again to control, things may go as they will: at the end of the tragedy you will be ruined and the victory of the proletariat will either be already achieved, or at any rate inevitable." ⁸⁹⁴

These wars, as Marx and Engels anticipated them, these international panaceas for bourgeois dyspepsia, would relieve it like soda at the outset — and no more lastingly. They would boom production and profits, absorb unemployment, forefend overproduction by producing for immediate destruction, divert accumulated hatreds from classes to nations, decimate the proletariat — and lighten thus the pressure on the bourgeoisie. But they are bound to come to an end in — what? This, says Engels, except in terms of destruction wrought, is unpredictable with any degree of specificity. Perhaps, he admits implicitly, a mere nationalistic redistribution of even more tenuous bourgeois resources, and thus, perhaps, still further bourgeois wars. Perhaps a victory for socialism here and there. But certainly a general economic collapse and crisis more profound than that which created the conflict — and eventually, with no slight possibility of doubt, socialism everywhere. From the very hopelessness of the tangle of capitalist contradictions, Marx and Engels feel altogether confident that eventually the bourgeoisie is through as an historic class and the proletariat as certain to achieve its classless triumph as Halley's comet is bound to reappear.

This is the Marxian picture. This, for better or worse, is the proof which historical materialist science offers that the historical materialist revolutionary injunction is a call to something which is possible of human accomplishment, and is thus, at least to this extent — and in contrast to utopian appeals — a proper ethical call.

Now in addition to the obvious ethical question which the necessity concept has posed, there is one as to the findings of Marxian social science itself: Would not the only truly proper empirical generalization that might be drawn from the historical materialist collection of past facts actually identify society with

⁸⁹⁴ In Engel's preface to Borkheim's *Zur Erinnerung für die deutschen Mordspatrioten 1806-1807*. Cited in *Selected Correspondence*, pp. 456-7.

classes, and does not, therefore, the Marxian leap to the concept of a classless society signal an ultimate abandonment of its announced empirical commitments in favour of thinking that is, however meritorious ethically, merely wishful scientifically? At some point this must obviously be considered carefully — perhaps in connection with the other problem, but in any case it would seem that the ethical question has now been too long pressing to merit anything but priority. Assuming then for the moment that Marxian science will be able to prove itself empirically correct, even in its use of the concept of a classless society — then is not Marxian ethics merely left all the more footless? Will not Marx and Engels actually have overproved their case? In their anxiety to demonstrate the possibility of human agency do they not push on beyond possibility to a conception of natural necessity that renders human agency, and hence ethics itself, quite as superfluous as impossibility itself would have done?

This is the chief ethical problem set by the theory of historic inevitability. It is one of the most interesting and important that can be raised about the Marxian understanding of man. But although it is often and elaborately discussed in Marxian interpretation and criticism, it remains one of the problems perhaps least satisfactorily dealt with. And, curiously enough — for Marx and Engels were apt to be quickly and carefully defensive of their theory in most of the obvious philosophical references — it is a problem which they themselves never think, apparently, of treating explicitly.

Persevering in a commitment made throughout this essay, that one of the measures of objective scholarship, though perhaps not the commonest, is the degree of intelligibility that can be fairly derived from Marx's and Engels' carefully considered efforts, rather than the amount of facile attack that can be devised against them, let us suppose that their reason for ignoring this problem was not oversight or philosophical incompetence, but that within the reference frame of their own understanding of the human situation, no such problem actually arises. Let us test this supposition against such facts as are available at any appro-

prate levels of discussion. It is clear that if we are to come to full grips with the problem, and with the Marxian theory of agency, which is central to the whole problem of human nature, at least three possible formulations of the inevitability dilemma will need to be examined — the metaphysical or a priori, the ontological, and the epistemological.

In its a priori reference, the issue is usually established on the assumption that there is a necessary logical connection between human freedom and some sort of metaphysical indeterminacy or spontaneity; irrespective of any particular content of discussion, it is held, the concepts of freedom and determinism are formally irreconcilable; only in a free and spontaneous universe can human freedom, and hence human agency, properly be conceived. Or, to put the matter negatively, if a man is caused to be what he is and to do what he does, then not he but the causes are responsible for his actions, not he but they are the agents, and it is specious to speak of him as "free." At this level of discussion, then, the questions to be asked of Marx and Engels are "Is historical materialism a determined system in the metaphysical sense indicated here?" and, "Can its conception of freedom be reconciled in any genuine way with metaphysical determinism?"

Since Marx and Engels seldom permitted themselves to indulge consciously in metaphysical pronouncement, for the most part directing their energies to problems of concrete historical action rather than into such theoretical debate as that concerning free will and determinism, it is difficult to know precisely what they would reply to the first of these questions. On the one hand, of course, they would probably point out that whatever determinacy informs their universe has less of speculative philosophy in its inspiration than of conclusions drawn from scientific practice, and that, to this extent at least, it differs from the kind demanded by the a priori formula. To the objection that they themselves attributed to the metaphysician Hegel⁸⁹⁵ the first proper formulation of their own theory of freedom as the recognition of necessity, they would, and properly could, reply that nothing is thereby proved; they attributed dialectics to him,

⁸⁹⁵ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 117-18) *Anti-Dühring*, p. 125.

too, and to various other speculative thinkers as early as several centuries B.C., but they would be quite right in claiming that there is nothing to prevent speculation and science from coming separately to identical or similar conclusions.³⁰⁶ On the other hand, however, it is clear enough that the very determinism within which most nineteenth-century scientific practice operated theoretically, and from which Marx and Engels took their cue, was itself largely a priori in character, deriving less from facts than from the exigencies of the metaphysical causal monism which characterizes the mechanical materialist *Weltanschauung*. Marx and Engels might perhaps remark that their dialectical views carried them far beyond this restricted conception to the recognition of a plurality of causes and of the multi-directionality of the lines of causal interaction. This is true and it is probably a mark of their scientific intelligence, but neither did they nor can we regard it as having introduced any "indeterminacy" into the ultimate jointure of things. Should it be urged that the "novelty," the "progress," the "emergence to new levels" which the dialectic furnishes with its qualitative leaps and transformations, give ultimate leeway for freedom in the sense of spontaneity, Marx and Engels themselves would quickly insist that while certain dialectical furniture is of primary ontological importance to their theory of freedom, it has nothing whatever to do with any ontological loose-jointedness: within their theory of multiple causal interactions, "iron necessity," "inevitability," "scientific precision" continue to operate. In any case, whatever their ultimate view of the universe, their man bears unmistakable marks of the determined being; unless the present essay errs in very fundamentals, he is a creature of specific, concrete, and scientifically ascertainable causes — whether or not these causes be ultimately metaphysical. Perhaps, indeed, as some have claimed, all reference whatsoever to causality is metaphysical.

Be this as it may, the answer Marx and Engels would give to the correlative question is somewhat less conjectural. Since they believed a priori speculation capable of proving nothing about

³⁰⁶ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 491) Cf. *Dialectics of Nature*, pp. 13-14; (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 22, 11) *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 26, 16.

anything concrete, or, what is much the same, of proving anything one chooses to "prove" about anything one chooses to think about, the problem of reconciling Marxian freedom with determinism — metaphysical or any other kind — would present them no great hazard. Suppose, for example, that in the name of ultimate human responsibility, one should make a priori option for an undetermined universe in preference to a determined one, a universe, that is, with gaps in its metaphysical processes where spontaneity, capriciousness, whimsicality were able to enter. Would it not become evident at once that human agency could get no proper toe-hold in the scheme of things; that man could find no lever for responsible action any more than he could count on building a fire to warm himself if the processes of thermo-dynamics were accidental rather than lawful? From this standpoint the concept of human freedom might be said to be more meaningful, even metaphysically, in a determinist reference frame than in an indeterminist one. How could a man be held responsible for what he himself does not do, intelligently and with a sense of consequences? If the act bears no determinate relations to his reasonable expectations, and if his motives and values are not integral members of the same determinate system, then the event merely *happens*; not he, but a miraculous accident is responsible, be it fate, God, a conspiracy of demons, or some kind of atomic epilepsy.

Although Marx and Engels never outline a case for determinism in this metaphysical fashion — the a priori issue seems to them distinctly a pseudo-one — there can be little doubt that if forced to metaphysical commitment they would ultimately take their stand with Spinoza, Hegel and the Stoics, if the alternative company were Epicurus, James and Scotus. Nowhere is there even a suggestion of the causeless in their scheme of things. Nowhere, correlatively, is their human agent ever suspected of having metaphysical spontaneity in his will, of being a breath of free enterprise that blasts at the bourgeoisie in the creative hope of some good ensuing. His world is tight, and for all its anguish, orderly. His freedom resides in his capacity for understanding that order, for achieving scientific comprehension of

the structure of natural and historical movement, for co-operating consciously with its causes, for making himself a deliberate and intelligent party to the operation of those causes, and thus, by accelerating the inevitable denouement, hastening the day when human beings will be able to be more than history's hastening agents and become what Marx and Engels have called its "masters."⁸⁹⁷

Such freedom might perhaps appear an unrewarding one. The hastening of history is a task of obvious stature, even of majesty, the ultimate mastery of history a noble goal; but is the thought of boon to future men so potent that present men will sacrifice for sake of it? To suffer the onus and constraint of being "revolutionaries" that others may at length enjoy true mastery of history, true freedom, would be a triumph of selfless idealism, but is it not, materially speaking, a somewhat drab and specious "freedom"? And, formally speaking, are there not in fact even ways in which the Marxian concept achieves essential travesty of freedom? Does the youth who collaborates with his metabolism so that he may eventually garner the dubious fruits of adulthood, make himself free in this act? Did the mystic, Margaret Fuller's decision to "accept the universe" — "Egad, she'd better!" Carlyle appropriately commented when he heard of it — constitute a meaningful act of freedom?

To the first consideration it is to be presumed that Marx and Engels would give serious attention; to the others, not — they merely restate the metaphysical issue and Marx's and Engels' interests lie elsewhere. The acts of will of Fuller and the youth clearly offer nothing at the a priori level that would open to Marxian dispute either their freedom or their ultimate wisdom. The quarrel would lie with the level of discussion itself. The ethical evaluation would be made contingent on empirical data — the kind of youth the metabolism was creating, the kind of universe the mystic was accepting; if the latter incorporated possibilities for scientific human transformation of it, if, in short, it were a Marxian universe, Marx and Engels would be ethically content. This *is* their meaning for freedom.

But that, materially speaking, this freedom is drab and specious, they would sharply deny. From whose material standpoint, they would ask, does being "revolutionary" represent onus and constraint? Only from the standpoint of those who do not want to change their lot, the small minority who share the privileges of bourgeois dominance. The downtrodden, the expropriated, the dispossessed, feel revolution as emancipation, not as limitation, and in respect not merely to its ultimate outcome for humanity at large, but in respect to its daily act for the subjugated themselves. If the proletarian's classless triumph is all of humanity's "leap," as Engels puts it,³⁹⁸ "from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom," his daily act is his own deliverance from servitude, he is, unlike the suppliant for bourgeois favours, enacting history instead of suffering it, he is master of his own destiny in the very making of it. And would not sheer semantic process compel even apriorists to admit that there is greater agency in the *making* of mastery — of history or of anything else — than in the mere possessing of it?

Turning now to the second area of discussion of the problem of agency, the ontological area, the question to be considered is not the un-Marxian one as to whether the possible predicables of abstract being leave freedom comprehensible a priori, but whether the historical materialist theory of reality — for the present to be considered apart from the question of how such reality is able to be known — provides any material locus for human causal action. Assuming the causal schema to be exclusive of openings or breaks, is there any room for human deeds therein?

Previous chapters have shown that there indubitably is. The pluralism implicit in materialist dialectics gave no opening indeed for spontaneity, but it rooted man with both feet — and arms and head — in nature's agency. He confronts nature, Marx has told us (*supra*, p. 50), "as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate nature's productions in a form suitable to his own wants."

³⁹⁸ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 296) *Anti-Dühring*, p. 310.

Through his own activity, he "initiates, regulates and controls the material reactions between himself and nature." "By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature. He develops the potentialities that slumber within him, and subjects them to his own control." Man here is standing to nature, clearly, neither in the relation of creature to creator nor of cause to effect; the situation is not dualistic but naturalistic, and the causality not mechanical but dialectical. Again and again Engels inveighs against the "senseless and anti-natural contradiction between mind and matter, soul and body," and equally frequently against the "hollow abstraction" of "cause here, effect there." "In nature," he says, "nothing takes place in isolation. Everything affects every other thing and vice versa . . . changes made in the environment . . . in turn react upon and change their originators." (*v. supra*, pp. 76, 91.)

In the realm of natural reality, then, Marxian causal process makes explicit ontological room for human action, provided this action is understood, dialectically, as *interaction*, and the causality itself as pluralistic. Does man's situation in the socio-economic sphere of reality, where he has been apt to fail in his intentions, where happenings so easily defeat his hopes, fare as well? Ontologically speaking, yes. His position for genuine agency remains uncompromised by the lame use he has often made of it. True, he himself is fully determined by, is no more than a crippled product of, the particular mode of production which constitutes the source and matrix of his livelihood and life. But, as has been clearly shown (e.g., *supra*, p. 97), of the four distinguishable elements whose causally interactive instrumentality constitutes that mode itself, man himself is one; "the subject, mankind," the needing organism, purposive human activity — in short, that very "human" element of nature whose causal determination and modification, along with its causal agency, is centrally in question in this study, is a nuclear causal factor. Elsewhere (pp. 111-12), we saw that it was men, not dialectical or technological travails that were ultimately responsible for setting up and upsetting productive systems. Clearly,

then, man has a hand in his destiny, whether he wills it or not, whether or not he is able to use it intelligently.

Is he, then, so able to use it? Is the situation with respect to human knowledge such that human agency, ontologically grounded now in nature and society, can incorporate intelligence? This, certainly, is the crux of the freedom question. Let us turn, then, finally, to a detailed consideration of the inevitability dilemma at this, the most difficult and important level, the epistemological. Can or cannot human knowledge play, without inconsistency, an active part in historical and human transformation as these are causally exhibited by Marxian social science?

To set this issue sharply for exploratory probing, we may usefully call upon one of Engels' best known statements of the historical materialist theory of agency. "Freedom," he says in *Anti-Dühring*,⁸⁹⁹ "does not consist in the dream of independence of natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws, and in the possibility this gives of systematically making them work toward definite ends. . . . Freedom of the will therefore means nothing but the capacity to make decisions with real knowledge of the subject. Therefore the *freer* a man's judgment is in relation to a definite question, with so much the greater *necessity* is the content of this judgment determined; while the uncertainty, founded on ignorance, which seems to make an arbitrary choice among many different and conflicting possible decisions, shows by this precisely that it is not free, that it is controlled by the very object it should itself control. Freedom therefore consists in the control over ourselves and over external nature which is founded on knowledge of natural necessity; it is therefore necessarily a product of historical development."

Freedom here is bluntly enough defined. Free will is placed explicitly not only in an historical, but in an epistemological context: "real knowledge of the subject" is made its mark and sanction. To discover, then, whether freedom truly fits into the Marxian scheme of things, we must inquire what meaning "real knowledge of a subject" has therein.

⁸⁹⁹ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 119) p. 125.

Approaching the problem concretely, in terms of the particular "subject" ultimately at issue here, it will be recalled that within the propositions of Marxian science, the necessity of a future classless society depended on the actual truth of two antecedent propositions: that a classless society will necessarily follow the defeat of the bourgeoisie; that the bourgeoisie will necessarily be defeated. It is important that we try to discover what Marx and Engels understood to be the character of their own knowledge that these two premises, both assertive of necessity, are true.

In the case of the major — "if the liquidation of the bourgeoisie, then a classless society" — the previous analysis has shown (*v. supra*, p. 176 f) that the necessity involved is practically a matter of definition within Marxian economic logic given the empirical conditions therein stipulated. This being the case, Marx's claim for "the precision of a natural science" in his anticipation of the transformation might even appear unduly modest — is it not rather as precise as the determinations of mathematical science itself? This could be true, of course, in contrast to the situation indicated by the minor premise, only because in the narrow phase of the matter in question, human agency is not itself a factor — except, obviously, in that it may now make decisions for future action with "knowledge" of the conditions already established by previous action. The "knowledge" here involved, in short, would be merely recognition, or, as Engels particularly would put it, "the reflection in consciousness" of an objective situation historically arrived at. The "free will" entering the picture would be merely freedom to decide, with knowledge of the subject, what to do next.

In the case of the minor premise, however — that the bourgeoisie will be defeated — definite difficulties are encountered if it is assumed that this static or "reflective" quotient of knowledge is all that is present. That it is absent, of course neither Marx nor Engels would contend: there is clearly indicated here as "subject," an objective historical situation in the process of determinate change — the development of class strug-

gle toward proletarian victory; there exist, as conscious reflections of that situation, the historical materialist analyses — Engels himself says that scientific socialism is the reflection in consciousness of the world of historical processes — and the decision which this “knowledge” offers the agent is how to behave in relation to the bandwagon. But — and here appears to be the rub — if he is really free to jump on or off, does not history’s bandwagon itself become hopelessly erratic? Who can claim that its direction is determinate — much less predictable “with the precision of a natural science”? Or, conversely, if its direction is in fact determinate, why should anyone bother, any more than one bothers to assume responsibility for astronomical performances, to jump on it? Why should not the Marxian agent sit back patiently and wait for the bourgeoisie to be beaten?

This is perhaps the sharpest form in which, at least in its ethical reference, the dilemma of historic inevitability can be put. The problem it sets — not in terms of *a priori* paradoxes but at the epistemological level, and supposedly within the context of Marx’s and Engels’ own professions and admissions — is whether historical materialism can with any authentic consistency manage to be both a science of society, with necessary predictions, on the one hand, and a valid call to ethical action on the other.

Within the reference frame of an ontological dualism of the Cartesian type, or even of a mechanical monism, it is clear that no such twofold claim could be easily established — especially if the issue were set, to boot, in the context of a simple mechanical “copy” or “reflection” theory of knowledge. How, within such reference frame, and given historical determinism, Marx and Engels or anyone else could ever arrive at a conceptual portrayal of the relation between theory and practice that would permit of intelligent agency, is hard indeed to see. And the actual integration of theory with practice which they, as philosopher-actors, achieved so notably in their own historic lives, would have to remain unintelligible. But such a dualism is not, we have clearly seen, the reference frame of historical materialist ontol-

ogy. Can we see, equally clearly, and in the face of widespread popular opinion to the contrary, that mere "static correspondence" is not the Marxian epistemology?

I think we can. Examination of all the relevant passages, in context and with care, constrains one in fact to wonder how such opinion has ever taken root. Superficial contact with Engels' writings might suggest it initially to the particularly allergic, but any serious study of his and Marx's cogitations on the knowledge problem shows that "copy" or "reflection" notions play a clearly subordinate role in their epistemology — and never the simple mechanical one of classic thought. Indeed, the majority of Engels' references to it (Marx himself makes few) are, even when couched in classical terminology, intended to be reiterations of his and Marx's ontological, rather than of any epistemological, *casus belli*. When Engels insists that ideas are reflections of the world, he is usually merely continuing to enunciate the Marxian insistence that the world is not a mere reflection of ideas, thus holding the fort for a realistic (he would say materialistic) ontology in opposition to all forms of transcendental or empirical idealism. To conclude from this realistic commonplace, as appears to be commonly done, that he and Marx held a static theory of knowledge in a Cartesian type of universe is, however, not only to overlook what has just been shown to be the essential character of their naturalism, of their dialectical ontology, of their causal pluralism with its multi-directionality of lines of interaction, but it is also quite to miss what are amongst the most important aspects of their contribution to epistemological theory.

Our need for a full understanding at this point of what these contributions are, at last provides opportunity to raise for serious consideration the procedural question that we felt called on earlier to postpone (pp. 183-4), for it is in that methodological context that the Marxian epistemology can be exhibited most effectively. The concern there, we saw, was whether, in the last analysis, empirical Marxism does not refute ethical Marxism. The question is this: if Marx and Engels chose, in support of their contention that private property is at the root of all evils in modern society, to supplement the tools of the

pulpit with those of the positive sciences — do they not actually end up in the plight of the scientists having proved too much for the preachers? Answering their presumable questions “What is society?” and, “What makes history move?” their empirical survey shows without negative instances,⁴⁰⁰ that society is class-divided and that class conflict is history’s motor. But if their diagnosis be thus demonstrated, is not their prescription at the same time rendered impotent? Could a genuinely scientific ethics do more than prescribe that men reconcile themselves to the class structure of society and try to better the world within that framework?

This would appear at first a rather serious problem — until it is recalled that the empirical method which it takes for granted Marx and Engels are employing is in fact a method which they not only explicitly, but sometimes abusively, repudiate.⁴⁰¹ Their own method, they claim, is dialectical materialism, which, though empirically grounded, has little if anything in common — except for obvious dependence on the facts of experience — with the method of enumerative empiricism. If this be the case, and it will shortly be obvious, I think, that it is the case, then the concern that Marxian science and Marxian ethics may constitute a contradiction within the theory of historical materialism need not arise.

The chief point here, however, is not to see what questions need not arise, but to learn from whatever questions can be put what Marx and Engels themselves understood “real knowledge of a subject” to mean. And for this reason it is perhaps permissible to stretch the present question to a point that would normally lie beyond the scope of this essay: granting that historical materialism is not refuted from within by enumerative empiricism, can it be thereby refuted from without?

Marx and Engels might, of course — even without recourse

⁴⁰⁰ Provided the gentile stage, being pre-historic, can be merely dismissed as speculative, not empirical.

⁴⁰¹ Cf. above, pp. 9, 39–40, 42–3. For other strictures, see (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 567, 656, 677–8, 678) *Dialectics of Nature*, pp. 113, 230, 258, 259; (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 23–5) *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 27–9; *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 406 n. Engels speaks of it, in its then current “naturalistic” form, as “the most certain way to think . . . incorrectly.” (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 715) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 309.

to their own method, that is to say, arguing strictly within classical empiricist premises — merely point out that even the soundest of empirical generalizations, the fatal character of Hodgkin's disease, for example, is at best probable; that when in fact the causes of malignant lymphoma are discovered and brought within the sphere of medical control, then the generalization will no longer hold. They could ask why it may not be thus with society. They themselves claim to have discovered, with the aid of empirical techniques, the causes of class division and to have devised a method for manipulating these causes toward the end of a classless society. In their view, thus, their science, far from rendering their practice impotent, is its very control and guarantor of deeds. Perhaps more constantly than many empiricists they might with justice claim to bear in mind the lesson taught by modern empiricism's first great spokesman — that knowledge is power; with Bacon they seek it not for contemplation but for action; with him they call upon empirical techniques not so that they may learn how to interpret the world, but that they may learn how to change it.⁴⁰²

But Marx and Engels go in fact beyond this kind of argument. They criticize the very premises of enumerative empiricism, and it is in these criticisms that one discovers the core of their own theory of knowledge. Their various charges against the method in question resolve themselves to two: that it erroneously regards its objects as unhistorical isolates,⁴⁰³ and that it quite neglects the quotient of "practice" in the scientific enterprise,⁴⁰⁴ proving itself in consequence to be as "metaphysical" and sterile as the emptiest apriorism. The empiricism of observation alone, Engels remarks properly enough, can prove nothing about the future of anything. *Post hoc*, he says, but not *propter hoc*. Whether the sun will or will not rise tomorrow, and whether future society will be classless or continue class divided, are problems quite beyond its competence to deal

⁴⁰² Cf. (I, 5, 535) Marx's Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 473.

⁴⁰³ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 23-5) *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 27-9; *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 406 n.

⁴⁰⁴ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 656) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 230; *On Historical Materialism*, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, pp. 399-401; *Ludwig Feuerbach*, *Ibid.*, pp. 432-3; cf. also (I, 5, 533-5) Thesis on Feuerbach, *Ibid.*, pp. 471-3.

with. The proof of future necessity, he and Marx believe, lies not in collections of isolated instances from the past, but, on the one hand, in the discovery of the manner of historical integration of past, present and future events, and, on the other, as Engels puts it: "in human activity, in experiment, in work; if I am able to make the *post hoc*, it becomes identical with the *propter hoc*." ⁴⁰⁵

It is evident that here Marx and Engels are viewing real knowledge of a subject, in contradistinction perhaps to formal knowledge, as something quite other than a mere static reflection, or even series of static reflections of a situation whose objective existence is mechanically independent of the knower — just as in their ontology and theory of production they viewed mind and matter, labour and nature, as something quite other than mechanical isolates with a unidirectional causal line operating between them. There they saw neither mind nor matter, neither man nor nature — "senseless" dichotomies — as dominating the other, neither as sole causes, neither as sole effects; man with his mind belonged to nature, was part of it, and his productive "mastery" over it consisted in the fact that he had the advantage over all other natural beings "of being able to know and correctly apply its laws." ⁴⁰⁶

But how — and here of course is the real question still remaining — how is man ever to be certain that he has proper knowledge of these laws? If he is to apply them correctly and with confidence, then he must be given some assurance that the nature of the universe is such that his ideas are appropriate to it, that his knowledge of objective law is true and real. Since much of traditional epistemological speculation is devoted to proving that the nature of the universe is precisely such that this assurance must forever remain beyond his grasp, Marx and Engels must somehow comfort him in this respect.

Their reassurance is simple, homely, and though they claim for it a sanction as hoary as humanity itself, essentially as new as much of modern operationalist doctrine. The question itself,

⁴⁰⁵ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 656) *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 230.

⁴⁰⁶ *Supra*, p. 108.

they say, is a pseudo-one, by definition unanswerable, a straw product of false and anti-natural dichotomies. Let man *show* the competency of his knowledge by the test of actual deed. "The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking," says Marx with an explicitness and finality that reveals him quite unbedeviled by any extant ghosts of the mechanical copy epistemology, "is not a question of theory but is a practical question. In practice man must prove the truth, *i.e.*, the reality and power, the 'this-sidedness' of his thinking. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question."⁴⁰⁷ And Engels too, equally disabused: "from the moment we turn to our own use external objects according to the qualities we perceive in them, we put to an infallible test the correctness or otherwise of our sense perceptions. If these perceptions have been wrong, then our estimate of the use to which an object can be turned must also be wrong, and our attempt must fail. But if we succeed in accomplishing our aim, if we find that the object . . . does answer the purpose we intended it for, then that is positive proof that our perceptions of it and its qualities, *so far*, agree with reality outside ourselves. . . . In Kant's time our knowledge of natural objects was indeed so fragmentary that he might well suspect, behind the little we knew about each of them, a mysterious 'thing-in-itself.' But one after another these ungraspable things have been grasped, analysed, and, what is more, *reproduced* by the giant progress of science; and what we can produce, we certainly cannot consider as unknowable."⁴⁰⁸

And what is true of knowledge of nature, is also true, Marx and Engels believe, of knowledge of society and history. "Social life," says Marx, "is essentially *practical*. All mysteries which mislead theory into mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice."⁴⁰⁹ Whether the "subject" of interest be nature or society, then, Marx and Engels maintain, in the former's words, that "the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human

⁴⁰⁷ (I, 5, 534) Second Thesis on Feuerbach, *Op. Cit.*, p. 471.

⁴⁰⁸ *On Historical Materialism*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 400-1. Engels' emphasis.

⁴⁰⁹ (I, 5, 535) Eighth Thesis on Feuerbach, *Op. Cit.*, p. 473. Marx's emphasis.

activity or self-changing can only be comprehended and rationally understood as *revolutionizing practice*.”⁴¹⁰

It should obviously be remarked here carefully that Marx does not merely say “*can* be so comprehended.” He says “*can only* be so comprehended.” And since, clearly enough, it is not at all thus that either apriorist or “contemplative” empiricist essays to comprehend and understand the character of knowledge, the central source of the Marxian quarrel with classical epistemology becomes evident. Persistently endeavouring to depict knowledge mechanically and abstractly instead of dialectically and practically, as a problem for theory instead of as a set of problems for production, empiricist and apriorist alike, think Marx and Engels, have persistently misrepresented the actual character of human knowledge as history reveals it. Moreover, persisting in trying to *practice* knowledge according to this awkward theory of it, they have, in Marx’s and Engels’ eyes, been cast out of the stream of history and society, relegated to the academies to speculate on fantasies and argue emptily, able to prove anything they set their thoughts to prove, or just its opposite, for there is no check on them in history or deeds: thought *v.* being, freedom *v.* determinism, appearance *v.* reality, the “thing-as-it-is-in-itself” *v.* the “thing-as-it-is-for-us.”

“But before there was argumentation,” says Engels, “there was action.” “*Im Anfang war die That!*” And human action solves such difficulties long before human ingenuity invents them. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. The most telling refutation of these and all other “philosophic fancies,” he believes with Marx, is industry, work, production.⁴¹¹

These very considerable anticipations of current pragmatist and instrumentalist criteria of validity not only represent, along with the historical materialist theory of ideology and of the class conditioning of human ideation, Marx’s and Engels’ most important contributions to epistemological thinking, but they place what historical materialism understands by “real knowledge of a subject” in quite a different light from that in which

⁴¹⁰ (I, 5, 534) Third Thesis on Feuerbach, *Op. Cit.*, p. 472.

⁴¹¹ *On Historical Materialism*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 399–400; Ludwig Feuerbach, *Ibid.*, p. 432.

it has come to be very widely viewed. This is not, of course, to suggest that the "praxis" element in Marxian theory of knowledge has gone in the past unnoticed — the more competent critics and interpreters from Marx's day to ours have always pointed it out, occasionally, even with an overemphasis that distorts the actual theory. What *has* largely escaped attention, however, is the extent to which Marx and Engels themselves establish identification between their theory of knowledge and their theory of production. Only in the context of the latter can the former be accurately and fully comprehended. Production, as they saw it, is a process going on in nature between the human part of nature and others of nature's parts, a process in which the distinctively human part is able to initiate, regulate and control the mutually transforming material interactions which constitute production not by virtue of any transcendent or supra natural powers attaching to it — for man belongs to nature, exists, as Engels puts it, with flesh, blood and brain in nature's midst — but by virtue of his natural ability, as a bird's ability to fly is natural, to know nature in himself and in nature's other parts, and to utilize that knowledge. This utilization, this application of nature's laws, is production. It is also knowledge. In it, two apparent "things," subject or man, object or nature, are realized as one "process"; *through human action*, the "subject, mankind," and the natural "*Gegenstand*" are integrated into a single dialectical event, transformative of both. "Real knowledge of a subject," then, as Marx and Engels understand it, is not a passive, subjective copy of fixed objective entities, but a mutually transforming integration, through practice, of the knower and the known. Action makes of them a dialectical-historical event, not mechanical or metaphysical isolates; the objective world of nature or society is revealed by historical practice, just as it is modified by the practice invariably attending its revelation, and as it in turn modifies the practitioner; "in revolutionizing activity, change of self coincides with change of circumstances."⁴¹² Thus, for Marx and Engels, knowledge *is*, to this extent, production, and production, knowledge. The

first and final test, they say, is "practice, *viz.*, experiment and industry." "If we are able to prove the correctness of our concept of a natural process by making it ourselves" — here ⁴¹⁸ Engels asserts the identification in almost so many words — "by bringing it into being out of its conditions and using it for our own purposes into the bargain . . ." then this is the end of the unknowable, this is certain knowledge. And this is, obviously, production.

It is not difficult now to see why Marx and Engels never felt themselves confronted by the "inevitability dilemma." In the focus of such conceptions as these of nature and of human ideation, of causal pluralism, of dialectical interaction, and of knowledge as production, there simply is no room for it. It might of course be urged that there is no room for it simply because there is no room left for predictability itself, that with their theory of knowledge as production, Marx and Engels have rescued human agency properly enough, but only at the cost of crying havoc to their socialistic science; to assert, in other words, that when men are able in practice to produce successful revolution, then the revolution they produce will be in fact successful, and both their agency and the prediction vindicated, is plausible enough; but the prediction has become a sheer *post facto* matter and nothing *pre* is left attaching to it.

This, however, would be a quick and superficial misconstruction of the situation Marx and Engels actually envisage. It is precisely because true knowledge is *not* divorced from practice, they obviously hold, precisely because action is concomitant with knowledge, that it is possible to *know* the future course of history. Men will in fact, knowing how to go about it, be able to produce successful revolution, and will, by knowing, produce it. The knowledge factor here has actual causal status (though of course not sole causal status). This explains, perhaps, why Marx and Engels permitted neither to themselves nor to their followers either practice without theory or theory without practice. It shows, too, that historical materialism itself is to be regarded not merely as the science of men's actions, the theory

of their revolutionizing practice, but in part at least, as an actual maker of their history-transforming deeds. And it shows, finally, that the "scientific prediction" of socialism rests not merely on awareness that the intolerable conditions of capitalist society will mechanically cause men to mill about in discontent, but on understanding that the scientific knowledge of the cause and cure of those conditions will enter dialectically into the situation to *generate corrective action*. The revolution, in other words, is to come about not, like astronomical events, without intelligent human agency. It is to come about because men, knowing how, will actually effectuate it. It is this that Marx and Engels hold to be as predictable as any event in natural science.

Perhaps a modern parallel will illuminate the thought. If a hundred fallen airmen, starving in the jungle, come upon a thousand beetle grubs, and if they are in ignorance whether these be nourishing or deadly, then the outcome of the encounter will be scientifically uncertain; there may be sheer avoidance or successful experimental dabbling. If the hunger state is sharp enough, then probabilities mount in favour of the latter, but any forecast made thereon could not be regarded by science as containing probability in sufficiently high degree to merit the same prediction. If, however, the airmen's diatetic knowledge tells them, or even if their service kit-books show them scientifically — as present GI kit-books do — how beetle grubs may be both nutritiously and edibly prepared, then it becomes fully predictable how both the grubs and airmen will be transformed by the encounter — not without intelligent human agency, to be sure — the men must, knowing why they do it, eat them — but, other things being equal, with the same approximate certainty that the behaviour of cathode rays is predictable. This interferes, of course, no more with the freedom of the individual airman than it does with the indeterminacy of the individual electron in the ray. The men are free to eat or not to eat. There may be individuals amongst the lot who, with doctors' orders, kosher scruples, lockjaw, desire for martyrdom, allergy to beetle grubs, generosity to others, or mere determination to be statistics baiters, will refrain from eating — as there

may be unpredictable electrons in the ray. But the macrocosmic outcome will be in no wise thereby affected.

This seems to be a fairly accurate and intelligible instance of what Marx and Engels conceive to be distinctively human and free behaviour. Its operation would be similar in social and productive action. If it dissolves the inevitability dilemma at the knowledge level, it will, perhaps, appear to invite a final obvious question at the a priori one. Are not the nonconformists in this jungle parable, what with their lockjaws, allergies, and other bodily and spiritual afflictions, quite as determined to their fasting as are the others, by their hunger, to their feasting, and does not serious talk of freedom here offend the Thought? Marx and Engels will only reiterate, I think, that *Im Anfang ist die That*; that the beetle grubs get eaten; that though history proves that thought and deed are one, yet with freedom as with beetle grubs, there is evidently no ultimate disputing as to tastes.

Whether Marxian agency can meet its own decisive standard of "the deed," by producing a socialist society, it is history's affair to prove, of course, not ours. But that when the full content of its meanings — naturalistic, dialectical, epistemological and socio-economic — are reckoned with, no particular theoretical inconsistency stands out, is the conclusion, I believe, that must here be drawn. The philosophic "freedom" issue was, of course, not at the center of Marx's and Engels' militant concern. They were much more interested in acting, and in directing action, than in maintaining flawlessly a theory that agency was possible, and their ordinary language often lapsed into the current idiom of a much more conventional determinism than is evident in any of the passages we have been probing here. But insofar as they were actually in possession of a consistent, and perhaps something of an epochal, theory of freedom, these passages are the clues to what it was. Production they have consistently depicted as a dialectically integrative process, transformative not only of nature and technique, but of man and man's society as well. Knowledge they have understood as the distinctively human manner of effecting natural and social

change. Freedom, finally, in these revealing passages, they make identical with knowledge, and it thus becomes — intelligent action, or the scientifically informed production of both natural and social goods. The eighteenth-century freedom of reason is here reconstructed into the twentieth-century freedom of intelligence, and within this reference frame the human being that emerges ultimately from historical materialist theory is one who is no longer history's pawn, no longer condemned by the blind mechanics of social and economic forces to the mere suffering of history, but one who is a maker of history, who, knowing the nature of those forces, becomes, by choice and action, a part of them, thus changing them, and changing, too, himself, thus guiding both along those paths where each may live its fullest fruitfulness and history become at last appropriate to the best that human nature can become. This, I believe, is Marx's and Engels' view of the ethical element, of the element of man's own agency in the determination of human nature.

It remains now only to ask what place this ethics of action, pugnacity, and partisanship can occupy theoretically in the tradition of which it forms, historically at least, a part — classical equalitarianism. It is a common theoretical commitment of our ethical teachers today — though scarcely a common practice of our citizenry at large — to regard duty as somehow indiscriminable with respect to human beings; to think of it as owed equally by every man to all others, whatever their class, whatever their historical epoch, by virtue of their possession each for himself, of individual personhood. This doctrine has been variously formulated in such commandments to the individual as that he treat all men as ends, none as means, all as subjects, none as objects; others, whenever and wherever, as though they were himself — the theory being that whether other individuals be friends or foes, whether they be aids or obstructions to the conditions of an ultimately genuine equalitarian humanism, the principle of rational justice states axiomatically that each nonetheless bears as he stands the inalienable right which follows from the numerical uniqueness of his own personhood — namely, the right to the good will of others.

Our obvious problem here is to discover whether Marx's and Engels' view of human responsibility, which centers obligation on the conduct of the class struggle, on militancy and practical hostility toward large numbers of human beings — though still a distinct minority — can be seen as in any way compatible with this injunction to the indiscriminate exercise of good will.

It must be remarked to begin with that Marx's and Engels' writings show little if any evidence of interest in good will. And, correlatively, it should be noted that they did not rest their charges against the enemy on bad will.⁴¹⁴ Here would seem supported a conclusion we have previously felt called upon to draw, that Marx's and Engels' interest was so largely in results that there was little room in it for motives. They reasoned perhaps that with things to be done, and the class war as a lever at hand for doing them, there was no time for belabouring their brains with rationalistic subtleties surrounding the bare rights of abstract personhood. It seems safe even to assert that they would actually have regarded such thinking, as they regarded most talk of "love," "brotherhood," "rights" and "justice," as genuinely unethical: action dissipated in what they considered ineffectual metaphysical speculation about unhistorical objects was to them always reaction — often as obstructive, whether intentionally or not, to the actual realization of socialist humanism as intended action against it. And finally, it would seem altogether appropriate to historical materialist theory that its ethical concepts *should* conflict with those of the equalitarian tradition from which it sprang; for that tradition, which emerged and flowered with the rise of the bourgeoisie, is, from Marx's and Engels' viewpoint, a part of the ideological superstructure reared on the basis of and maintained for the ultimate defense of capitalist social relations.

So it is not surprising to find Marx and Engels adding to their strictures on moral utopianism some ironic sociological commentary on that personalistic concept which, perhaps above all

⁴¹⁴ Marx, as we have seen (*supra*, pp. 109–10), explicitly absolves the capitalists of blame for viciousness. (Preface to the first German Edition of *Capital*, Kerr, p. 15.)

others, has dominated the equalitarian thinking of our time: the good will. "The condition of Germany at the end of the last century," they write in *The German Ideology*, "is completely reflected in Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*. Whilst the French bourgeoisie raised themselves to supremacy and conquered the European continent by the most colossal revolution known to history, whilst the English bourgeoisie, already politically emancipated, revolutionized industry and subjugated India politically and all the rest of the world commercially, the impotent German bourgeois could get no further than 'the good will.' Kant contented himself with the mere 'good will' even when it remained without any result, and placed the *realization* of this good will, the harmony between it and the needs and impulses of the individual, in the *Hereafter*. . . . Neither he nor the German bourgeois, whose euphemistic spokesman he was, noticed that the basis of these theoretical ideas of the bourgeoisie lay in material interests and in a *will* conditioned and determined by the material conditions of production: he therefore separated this theoretical expression from the interests it expresses. . . ." ⁴¹⁵

Thus far, then, there would seem to be little ambiguity about the Marxian repudiation of equalitarian personalism and all of its works. But it was after all none other than Marx who contributed to ethical thought that famous ideal of distributive justice — "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs" — which has not only become widely accepted as the criterion of a truly humanist (Marx would say functioning communist) society, but represents, from anyone's standpoint, the flowering, completion, and synthesis of all the most able saws of the classical equalitarians. In it is more than fully encompassed not only Bentham's "greatest good to the greatest number," not only the popular democratic "equality of opportunity" and Rashdall's subtler and more perceptive "equality of consideration," but even the famous second maxim of Kant himself, which proclaims the ideal of a humanity which, in

⁴¹⁵ Quoted in *Selected Correspondence*, p. 531.

any man's person and every man's, is always regarded and treated as an end in itself, never as merely a means.

This is powerful evidence suggesting that somewhere full resolution is to be found between the Marxian and the parent ethical traditions. As confirmed equalitarians Marx and Engels perhaps felt, it could be argued, that the ultimate goal, being rationally obvious, needs little discussion or clarification; that today's true ethical problem is not one of interpreting the good abstractly but one of creating it concretely in society. In the full quantitative and individualistic spirit of Benthamite equalitarianism, and in full final allegiance to, if not in temporary tactical compliance with, the Kantian personalistic injunction, they can show that although in the creation in question the abstract rights of many hitherto concretely exploiting persons are bound to be pushed aside, their number is nonetheless infinitesimal compared to those who continue to suffer while the issue is deferred by the conscientious and scrupulous soul-searchings of men of good will. In this sense the partisanship of historical materialist ethics, which appears in itself to constitute a departure from traditional equalitarianism, can be seen as merely relative and methodological, while its goal, an equalitarian humanist society in which good will can at last become general, remains ultimate and absolute.

Since the case for this can be so reasonably contended, there is perhaps a certain amount of truth in it. But to accept it as the whole truth and nothing but the truth as many writers, even socialist ones, sometimes incline to do, would require dealing cavalierly with a whole mass of important evidence. Marx and Engels again and again repudiate all ethical absolutes, including the equalitarian. "We reject every attempt to impose on us any moral dogma whatsoever as an eternal, ultimate and forever immutable moral law," says Engels flatly. "We maintain on the contrary that all . . . moral theories are the product in the last analysis, of the economic stage which society has reached at that particular epoch. . . ." ⁴¹⁶ "The idea of

⁴¹⁶ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 98) *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 104-5.

equality . . . is itself an historical product, the creation of which required definite historical conditions which in turn themselves presuppose a long previous historical development. It is therefore anything but an eternal truth."⁴¹⁷

The fact of the matter is, Marx and Engels believed, that whatever their reasonings may be, "men consciously or unconsciously derive their moral ideas in the last resort from the practical relations on which their class position is based — from the economic relations in which they carry on production and exchange."⁴¹⁸ Right, says Marx, whether it be equal right or any other kind, "can never be higher than the economic structure of society and the cultural development thereby determined."⁴¹⁹ It emerges then, in sum, that since society for Marx and Engels has always been, and still is, class divided, morality, equalitarian or otherwise, has always been, and still is, "class morality." Engels puts the matter unambiguously: since "society has hitherto moved in class antagonisms, morality was always a class morality: it has either justified the domination and the interests of the ruling class, or, as soon as the oppressed class has become powerful enough, it has represented the revolt against this domination and the future interests of the oppressed."⁴²⁰ It follows clearly that in their view neither their own nor any other ethics can make pretensions to an absolute.

And here in the moral sphere, as previously in the epistemological one, we find an unmistakable departure from the classical views. We saw that physical, biological, religious, political

⁴¹⁷ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 111) *Ibid.*, p. 118. Calling upon history to support this contention, he argues that many thousands of years had to pass before it even occurred to anyone that men should have equal rights in state and society, not to speak of such a thought as coming to appear "natural and self-evident." In primitive societies, for example, he says, "equality of rights existed at most for members of the community; women, slaves and strangers were excluded from this equality as a matter of course;" to the ancients it would have seemed idiotic that Greeks and Barbarians, freemen and slaves, citizens and dependents should have claim to equal status; "Christianity knew only one point in which all men were equal: that all were equally born with original sin — which corresponded perfectly with its character as the religion of the slaves and the oppressed;" finally, "the overrunning of Western Europe by the Germans abolished for centuries all ideas of equality, through the gradual building up of a complicated social and political hierarchy." (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 107) *Ibid.*, p. 114. Cf. Ludwig Feuerbach, *Op. Cit.*, p. 448.

⁴¹⁸ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 107) *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁴¹⁹ *Critique of the Gotha Program*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 565.

⁴²⁰ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 98) *Anti-Duhring*, p. 105.

and social ideas are depicted by Marx and Engels as, on the one hand, historically conditioned, and, on the other, not merely as reflections or interpretations of an objective order of being existing in mechanical independence of the subjects which hold them, but rather as dialectical instruments functionally involved in the transformation of that order. It is precisely thus also that they understand moral ideas. And it is doubtless in accordance with the demands of this practical or productive element in their ethical theory that they consistently judge equalitarian concepts not, as the classical equalitarian theorists judged them, in terms of the axiomatics of "right reason" but in terms of the interests they are called upon to serve. Regarding them as demands for change and creators of transformative action rather than as mere interpretations of the human lot or propositions capable of eliciting general agreement, their matter interests Marx and Engels more than does their form. Engels goes so far as to assert that his concern for establishing their scientific content is partly in order to be able to determine their value for proletarian agitation.⁴²¹ Reviewing the matter with this end in view he correlates the transformation of meaning which the concept of equality has undergone since feudal times with the changing agitational role which it has been called upon to play in society. Originally a demand for bourgeois liberation from specific feudal socio-economic restrictions, he says, it eventually became magnified by the bourgeoisie into a general principle of abstract human right, but the most it ever represented in specific content was nonetheless merely a call for the abolition of the *privileges* attending the dominance of one class over others.⁴²² The least the proletarian demand represents, however, — it grew out of the bourgeois demand, to be sure, but gave it a new specific content and a more extensive one ⁴²³ — is for the abolition of classes entirely. "The demand for equality in the mouth of the proletariat has therefore," he concluded, "a double meaning. It is either . . . the spontaneous reaction against

⁴²¹ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 107) *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁴²² (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 109-10) *Ibid.*, pp. 116-17.

⁴²³ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 110) *Ibid.*, p. 117. Cf. also Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 563.

the crying social inequalities, against the contrast of rich and poor . . . surfeit and starvation; as such it is the simple expression of the revolutionary instinct, and finds its justification in that, and indeed only in that. Or, on the other hand, the proletarian demand for equality has arisen as the reaction against the bourgeois demand for equality, drawing more or less correct and more far-reaching demands from this bourgeois demand, and serving as an agitational means in order to rouse the workers against the capitalists on the basis of the capitalists' own assertions; and in this case it stands and falls with bourgeois equality itself. In both cases its real content is the demand for the *abolition of classes*. Any demand for equality which goes beyond that, necessarily passes into absurdity."⁴²⁴

Passages of this sort, and they are frequently encountered in the Marxian writings, might suggest a view of the moral nature of man that is not only far removed from the classical equalitarian, but appears to be pragmatic to the point almost of being sheerly opportunist. I think that there can be no question that the departure from the classical tradition is radical in this respect, but to charge opportunism is to overlook important specific commitments that Marx's and Engels' attitudes reveal. Marx speaks of "advance" in the conception of equality⁴²⁵ and deplores the "defects" in application of equal rights that will be possible even in the earlier phases of communism.⁴²⁶ Engels speaks of "progress" in morality and complains that we have not yet been able to pass beyond a merely class morality.⁴²⁷ Both look forward to the day when a "really human morality" will be possible. And such commitments seem not only far removed from opportunist relativism, but appear even to stand in a relation of inconsistency with the former set of thoughts.

If however Marx and Engels ultimately take the view that moral ideals, like scientific, social, political, and historical ones, are forms of human knowledge — and there can ultimately be

⁴²⁴ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 110-1) *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 117-18.

⁴²⁵ *Critique of the Gotha Program*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 564.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, also p. 565.

⁴²⁷ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 98) *Anti-Dühring*, p. 105.

little doubt that they took in fact this view⁴²⁸ — then the problem of moral knowledge can be interpreted in the light of their theory of knowledge at large with no particular question of consistency arising. Physics, biology, historical science, and scientific socialism itself, Marx and Engels believe, were born and grew mature in social conflict, were conditioned at every stage in their development by social and economic inhibitions and demands. Yet what they themselves call “the giant progress of science” is in no way thereby gainsaid, and they themselves remain its ardent sponsors. That the tree of natural knowledge has sociological roots, does not, it seems, frustrate its flowering into truths.⁴²⁹ It appears, rather, that in their view, the fact that ideas of any kind have in every case a human genesis in social production, far from disqualifying them as progressively adequate approximations to reality, tends rather to guarantee their validity, competence, fruitfulness, and relevance to that reality.

And thus too is it, I think we must conclude, with their understanding of moral knowledge. Morality has heretofore been bred, they say, in social conflict, is properly to be understood not metaphysically but as competing sets of social partisan demands. But this utile social origin is morality’s very sanction, not its confutation; its validity resides in its very lack of metaphysical encumbrance, of absolute or universal status, in its concrete, specific, and historically creative instrumental movement. Morality that is designed to suit all periods, all peoples and all conditions, says Engels explicitly, is precisely for that reason never and nowhere applicable,⁴³⁰ thus according to the Marxian theory of knowledge as production, never and nowhere valid. But that, for all the relativity in morals, “there has on the whole been progress in morality, as in all other branches of human knowledge, cannot be doubted.”⁴³¹ Just as science has up till now manifested increasingly adequate correspondence to, and creative integration with, the order of natural be-

⁴²⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁴²⁹ Still “relative” truths, of course, not absolute or changeless ones.

⁴³⁰ *Ludwig Feuerbach, Op. Cit.*, pp. 449–50.

⁴³¹ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 98) *Anti-Duhring*, p. 105.

ing, so has morality approached the order of desirable being. That this progress will continue seems to them inevitable. That society will eventually even pass quite beyond its present "class" morality and inaugurate a "truly human" one ⁴³² is as certain as that capitalism will give way to socialism.

It could not have done so yet, they think, and cannot for some time. "A really human morality which transcends class antagonisms and their legacies in thought becomes possible," says Engels, "only at a stage of society which has not only overcome class contradictions but has even forgotten them in practical life." ⁴³³ Only "in a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of individuals under division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished, after labour has become not merely a means to live but has become itself the primary necessity of life, after the productive forces have also increased with the all round development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly — only then," says Marx, "can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be fully left behind and society inscribe on its banners: from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." ⁴³⁴

From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs — a truly human condition of the species, this, a rich reward for effort for bourgeois and proletarian alike, a universal ideal to strive for in the particularity and partisanship of present social conflict, but not, for all this, absolute. The Marxian world of science, art, and ethics, the Marxian world, in short, of human potentialities, is dialectical and limitless. Future human relations, future conditions of production, will doubtless eventually unearth even a better goal to aim at. Until then, what? Just this, think Marx and Engels, that of all moralities available to men today, whether they want the absolute, the eternal, and the best, or are content with merely the promising, the fruitful, and the better, then "certainly that morality which contains the maximum of enduring elements is the one which, in

⁴³² Cf. *Ibid.*

⁴³³ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁴ *Critique of the Gotha Program, Op. Cit.*, p. 566.

the present . . . represents the future: that is the proletarian."⁴⁸⁵

In this way and no other, Marx and Engels believe, can proletarian and equalitarian ideals come to coalesce. Whether this constitutes a departure from, or an extension of classical equalitarianism, is ultimately, I suppose, to be decided by the breadth of one's vision and loyalties.

⁴⁸⁵ (I, *Sonderausgabe*, 97) *Anti-Duhring*, p. 104.

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